The Greatest Show on Earth (On Hiatus)

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The Greatest Show on Earth (On Hiatus)

by Underground

Summary

Hannibal Lecter would like your attention.

This is a sequel to He Who Pours Out Vengeance.

This story is currently on hiatus. I'm very sorry for leaving you hanging. You can visit my Tumblr for more information. Thank you for all of your support.

Notes

This takes place after most of the events of He Who Pours Out Vengeance, which I wrote between Season 1 and Season 2 and is now firmly AU.

Here's what happened previously: Hannibal and Will played a long elaborate game of prison chess, which ended with Hannibal killing Alana, thereby revealing his nature to the world and liberating Will from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Will thanked him for that by gutting him with a linoleum knife.

This fic is not the "Zero Doors" scenario as promised by the final chapter of HWPOV. It won't be novel-length. It's more of a companion piece than a true sequel; in places it even becomes a remix. All your favorite characters are back, even the dead ones, and there's a new slash in the pairings. Don't be alarmed. These are Hannibal's designations, for this is Hannibal's mind, Hannibal's rules, Hannibal's world. Enjoy your stay.

Chapter 1

When he first wakes up, he doesn't remember. His past is a haze. His present is a trap. Skeins of thought unravel in his mind, and in his mouth a taste not quite blood. Something sweeter. Not unlike the finish of a good Sauternes. He tries to speak around the mouthpiece of his ventilator, but to his shock the words he finds are from the native tongue in which he usually doesn't even think, let alone speak. The words roll over and die before they cross the boundary of his teeth. Overmastering her fear, the nurse removes the mouthpiece and leans in close to his lips. Into the vulnerable shell of her ear he whispers: "Will."

They adjust his morphine, take him off the ventilator for good. Clarity returns, and with it time stretches forward and memory back. Clarity begets curiosity, but his means for satisfying it are limited. His vision is dim. There is nothing to hear except the faint sounds of traffic many stories below and the steady whirs and pulses of the mechanical vigil at his bedside. Smell is all he has. One of the guards outside his door favors chewing tobacco. The nurse uses lavender-scented face soap, a drugstore brand. He can smell his own sterilized skin and unwashed hair, but these are perfumes next to the stench of his injury.

His attending physician avoids his eyes as he gives Hannibal the barest summary of his condition. Nothing he hasn't already ascertained for himself. It has taken them three surgeries to repair the damage done to his large intestine and stomach, but his spleen is gone for good. Hannibal makes some polite inquiries on the methods and equipment used in his colostomy, lures his doctor into complacency, and then asks:

"Do you still have it?"

"Have what?"

"My spleen." He labors for comprehensibility, but try as he might his voice remains nothing but rumbles and squeaks.

"Why do you ask?" says his doctor, when he finally understands.

"I would like to see it."

The doctor's mouth falls open unattractively, which makes Hannibal's own mouth curve upwards a fraction.

"I've never seen one of my organs before. This is a rare opportunity. If you don't mind indulging me."

The doctor wheezes out something unapologetic about waste disposal and hospital policy before beating a retreat. They don't show Hannibal his spleen.

When Hannibal shuts his tired eyes, he imagines his hands wrapped around his doctor's spleen, the organ firm and richly purple. He enfolds it in Serrano ham and sage leaves, braises it in stock; slices the result in a russet spiral, garnishes with cornichons and spears of red onion. Perfect. Usually he would file such an imagining away for deliberation and later orchestration—but now he simply discards it. There is a strange new freedom in imagining things he no longer has the power to make material, in imagining purely for imagining's sake. The thought divorced from the action.

Shame about his spleen, though.

He remembers, very distantly, the soft fall of organs in his hands. As he lay on the rough floorboards in his borrowed clothes, he felt the curve of his large intestine caressing his palm —or had that been Will's hand in his? The mind plays tricks.

Will saw his organs. Witnessed the dark interior of his body. So did Jack.

There is Jack, standing by the door. Firmly rooted but uncertain, as if awaiting the moment when he has summoned the willpower to turn around and go.

"Jack," says Hannibal, elevating his bed as much as he can without causing himself additional agony. "Good to see you."

Jack says nothing.

"You're looking well."

These social niceties make no impact. Jack looms darkly, taut mouth shut. Hannibal schools his face into mild incomprehension, a mask for his amusement.

"Have you only come here to stare at me?"

"So that's how it's gonna be." Jack's voice is quiet. "Still playing this game."

"Game?"

"Pretending to be my friend."

"I was never pretending, Jack."

"Uh huh." Jack's expression is forbidding.

Hannibal expected Jack's reaction, of course. But what Hannibal did not expect is the pang of loss he experiences at seeing their friendship sundered. Hannibal relishes this feeling inside himself, examines it from every angle. Finds it very rare and interesting.

Jack is struggling with a similar pain. The pain of betrayal. It clings to him like a second skin, especially prominent in the creases of his shirt, the shadows in his eye sockets. He is five

pounds thinner than when Hannibal last saw him. Jack has come here out of professional curiosity and personal vendetta: to pull back the veil and finally confront the monster behind it. So Hannibal resolves to give him nothing but the man.

He bows his head politely. “I’m sorry you have to see me in this state.”

“I’m sorry, too.”

“Because you’d rather see me cold and prone on a mortuary slab?” Hannibal smiles. “It’s all right, Jack. We must learn to live with disappointment, and would you really have it any other way? Dreams cease being dreams when they come true. Tell me, how is Bella?”

A nerve well struck. Jack snaps: “You don’t get to call her that.”

“Phyllis, then.”

Jack takes a step towards Hannibal, his head lowered like a charging bull’s. “Are you being malicious,” he asks, something like wonder in his voice, “or just delusional?”

“I’m being courteous,” says Hannibal.

“You’ve killed forty-eight people. That we know about.”

Hannibal cants his head, his polite listening face.

“Are there more? My gut tells me there’s more.”

A wistful hum from Hannibal. “I no longer have the luxury of consulting *my* gut.”

The joke falls flat as a corpse. And to think Jack used to laugh the loudest at the feeblest of Hannibal’s little quips.

“You want to be courteous?” Jack says, eyes narrowed. “Then you help me out here. It’s in your best interests if you’re honest with me right now about the number of people you’ve killed.”

Hannibal makes a show of ruminating on this, using the time to accustom himself to the way in which Jack is staring at him. He isn’t used to being stared at in this manner, at least not by someone who isn’t moments away from death. Will never looked at Hannibal like this; even at his most accusatory, there had always been the light of recognition in his eyes. But Jack stares at Hannibal as if Hannibal is a hitherto unknown creature belched out of the alien depths of the ocean, phosphorescent and ageless with spines and teeth dripping venom. Hannibal imagines he will be the object of stares like Jack’s with some frequency henceforward. He finds he doesn’t mind it.

He bathes in the silence until he can see Jack’s patience ebbing. Then he says: “I’m not a sportsman, Jack. I don’t keep score.”

Jack’s eyelids slip. He doesn’t believe a word.

“And even if I did,” Hannibal continues, “we can’t have that conversation without my lawyer present.”

Jack smiles now, bitterly. “I thought you wanted to be friends.”

“It’s nothing personal.”

“Nothing personal?” Jack stalks forward almost to the foot of Hannibal’s bed. “You served me human flesh at your dinner table, Dr. Lecter. In wine reductions. In soufflés. On toast points. You served it to me. You served it to my *wife*.”

“I shared my predilections with all my friends.”

“*Why*?”

Hannibal rolls the answer on his tongue for a good long moment. “It gives me pleasure watching others enjoy what I enjoy.”

“It gives you pleasure perverting and destroying everything you touch.”

A sad smile on Hannibal’s face, one he hasn’t consciously manifested there. “You don’t understand.”

“Then explain it to me.”

“But you don’t need *me* to explain it.”

And with this, Hannibal’s eyes score Jack’s face, looking for anything, anything…

Jack’s expression closes, but not fast enough.

“Ah.” Hannibal turns away. Stares at a strip of sunlight caught between the window blinds. A note of weariness in his voice he can’t disguise.

“He’s already gone.”

Predictable Jack goes bright-eyed with fury. “*He* isn’t your business any more.”

“Neither is he yours,” says Hannibal, still looking at the window. “Now that he has left the FBI. Become his own man.”

Jack’s jaw and fists clench. Physically grasping at the tattered edges of his patience. Clearly Will has become a verboten subject between them: and to think there was once a time when they discussed him almost exclusively.

“It’s just you and me now,” says Jack. “So work with me here. Explain yourself to me. Explain—explain why you killed Alana Bloom. Start there.”

Hannibal draws a long breath, lets his eyelids slip down martyr-like. “I’m sorry, Jack.”

Jack says nothing, but his nostrils flare.

“I can’t explain that to you.”

Jack rolls his eyes. “Not without your lawyer present.”

“I can’t explain it,” says Hannibal, patient to a fault, “because I don’t understand it myself.”

Jack’s eyebrows jump. “You don’t understand it,” he repeats dubiously. “*You*.”

Hannibal is rueful, even as a part of him preens at the implicit compliment.

“I’m afraid I don’t. No more than I can fathom the complexity of those great mysteries of nature: the origins of life, the sudden downfall of an ancient empire, the mass extinction of a hardy species. Chains of cause and effect stretching back into time immemorial, beyond my comprehension, beyond anyone’s. Alana reaped the misfortune of having strayed into the convergence of those merciless forces beyond our ken that govern our lives. In my kitchen she and I stood at the center of a web comprised of chance and choice, factors and decisions, some of them hers, some of them mine, some of them…” Jack’s nostrils flare again, so Hannibal lets the sentence trail. “How can I explain what happened, Jack, when I constitute but a part of it?”

“You could explain your part,” says Jack, singularly unmoved by all this rhetoric.

“My part, on its own, is inadequate.” Hannibal sighs now, not for show. If he is to be interrogated, he’d rather it not be about Alana. “I can’t help you, Jack. I can’t repair the damage done.”

Jack’s face is grim. “I’m not asking you to repair the damage done. I just want to understand the damage you did.”

Hannibal scrutinizes Jack’s face, nods in sympathy and respect for the emotion he sees there. “If you want to understand it, then there’s only one thing you can do. You must reconstruct. Bring back together all those shattered parts that once comprised the fatal whole. Unfortunately Alana’s part is lost to us. That leaves only mine…”

“And Will’s,” says Jack, his expression hardening to stone.

“The results would be illuminating,” says Hannibal, mildly.

Jack takes this in. “You’ll cooperate with my investigation if I put you and Will in a room together again, is that what you’re telling me?”

Hannibal smiles.

Jack leans forward, smiles back—a cruel smile, calculating in its viciousness. “That. Is never. Going to happen.”

Hannibal stops smiling. He says:

“A perilous word to use, ‘never’. Tempts fate.”

Now Jack leans forward, bracing his arms on the rails of Hannibal's hospital bed. He comes in so close their foreheads are almost touching—an act of considerable bravery, for Hannibal's teeth are as sharp as ever.

"I see I'm gonna have to make something clear to you, because apparently it isn't clear enough already. I don't care what you say, what you do, how much solid information you bargain with. You are never going to see Will Graham again. And when I say that, I'm not tempting fate—I am waging war against it. I am making it my personal mission to keep the two of you apart any and every way I can. That's a promise."

Jack's eyes are large and purposeful. Beautiful eyes. Hannibal looks into them and feels something like pity for Jack, damnably stubborn Jack, so dominated by his own guilt that he's trying to assuage it by putting himself between heaven and earth in the middle of a lightning storm. If he insists on standing there, then let him fry.

"You won't be able to keep that promise, Jack."

"Watch me." For one charged instant, Jack's fists tighten on the bedrails. Then he stalks from the room.

Time passes in uncountable increments. The machines hooked to his body warble and tick, tick and warble. A chemical haze clings to everything. Hannibal sleeps when he doesn't mean to, wakes when he'd rather dream. He has no appetite.

The nurses come regularly to change his bandages, irrigate his wound. They pull at his riven flesh in ways that make the cords stand out on Hannibal's neck. His eyes leak tears that run through the crevasses of gray, tightly drawn skin, the salt stinging when it comes into contact with the half-healed bite mark on his cheek. Where injuries meet injuries, a cascade of pain. Try as he might to retain his reason, he becomes a creature of pure feeling in these moments, overburdened as he is by indignities, by these mortifications of his flesh, this helplessness. Now he wishes—oh how he wishes—that the linoleum knife had been pointed on both ends.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Wolf Trapped and papped.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Already he’s adapting.

From day to day his palace grows in substance and in majesty. The walls climb. The stone hardens. The marble develops a pitiless sheen.

Past the vaulted heights of the foyer lies the main exhibit hall, its architecture a cross between the opulence of the Uffizi and the airiness of the Musée d'Orsay. Here his work is on display in frames, atop plinths, and under glass, each lit for maximum clarity and impact. Bone fragments gleam like pearls, blood sucks in light as greedily as does a Caravaggio. In an alcove *The Wound Man* is mounted under a spectral spotlight, the work’s distorted shadow thrown gargantuan against the wall behind it. In a discreet corner *The Lovers* plight their troth beneath a bower of black onyx roses. *The Girl on the Stag* is the stately centerpiece of a Spanish style fountain that marks the exact middle of the hall.

He walks with strength and purpose past these monuments, the soles of his Italian loafers clicking on the cold floor. He is counting doors; there are many in the main hall. All are entryways into galleries of other artists’ work—paintings, sculpture, frescoes, tapestries—each of them keyed to a specific memory.

Hannibal’s organizational methods are carefully crafted. Artistic movements and schools represent different periods of his life, their color and texture and violence encapsulating some defining aspect of his own experience. Over and over he visits the Mannerists, the Fauvists, the Ottoman textiles, the great masters of the Renaissance; he avoids the Byzantine and the Neoclassicists, is careful only to visit the Ukiyo-e prints on special occasions, delights in those memories inspired by the Greeks and the Egyptians; in moments of embarrassing nostalgia he enjoys the Pre-Raphaelites; in times of fury he indulges in the German Expressionists; he always takes great pleasure in the Confucian and Hindu, in the Romantics and Symbolists, and especially in the Baroque. The Baroque is where he stores his memories of those banner years of Baltimore, now ended. He is heading there presently.

In these beloved galleries the light lies thick and golden as the crust of a canelé. His attention is drawn to the soft curves of the Bernini sculptures, to the rich darknesses and grave white faces of those paintings by Vermeer and Velázquez. The musical accompaniment in these rooms is of course the *Goldberg Variations*, as played by an Iranian harpsichordist he once heard in concert in Milan. But other sounds leak out from particularly potent repositories of memory: fragments of intimate conversations, gunshots, a standing ovation, the rhythmic chopping of a carbon steel blade. He follows one particular aural thread—dogs barking. It leads him through a set of velvet curtains to a spiral staircase. At the top: a dark turret room, windowless, with an ecclesiastical hush. This is where he keeps his Rembrandts, and Will.

The eyes of the Self Portraits follow him as he does a circuit of the room. He glides past *The Night Watch*; past *The Slaughtered Ox* and *The Anatomy Lesson* (two of his special favorites); past *The Mill*, *The Descent from the Cross*, *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee*; past *Judas Repentant* and *The Abduction of Proserpina*; past *St. Peter in Prison* (precious encasement of many treasured memories), until he finally reaches the origin place of the barking dogs. To stand in front of this painting is to wallow in the din. The painting is *Abraham's Sacrifice*. Hannibal takes a moment to appreciate the drama of Abraham's arrested expression; the falling dagger; the cruelty and gentleness of the father's hand splayed over the entirety of his son's face; the pale expanse of Isaac's unmarked skin. When he has looked his fill, Hannibal steps inside the masterwork, veers around the frozen tableau, and dives deep into the rock-strewn forest that serves as the painting's backdrop. In the distance he sees the farmhouse, a purplish huddle against the orange sky. Here lies Wolf Trap.

Hannibal can live inside a memory as an active participant or as a detached observer; he can even double his awareness and be both at once. For now he is content to recreate, to be as he was then: the man of spent violence awaiting a homecoming.

He sits in the frayed armchair in Will's living room, measuring time via the *click click click* of the linoleum knife against his knee. He is almost outside himself with anticipation. His thoughts are so saturated with blood and hope that they soon reach a pitch too agonizing to bear. He finds relief in becoming Will for a time. Will, about to cross the threshold of this little house for the first time in months. Hannibal tries to see the room as Will will see it: the mélange of familiar objects and the strange empty spaces left by those of his possessions the FBI has removed. These shapes and smells are Will's and yet Will's no longer. In his absence his territory has reverted back to No Man's Land. But no, that's not so. This land has a new claim: Hannibal's, as he has spent so many of his hours here, not only today but cumulatively over the course of Will's institutionalization. Hannibal has memorized these walls and corners, left footprints in the dust, stared out of the misted windows as if scrying for a ghost. Yes, it's unmistakable: he looks at the room through Will's eyes and sees traces of himself.

Headlights cut through the dark, throwing across Hannibal's face the gridded shadow of the window.

Will.

Hannibal turns his head a fraction, watches him emerge from the car and gather his dogs from the van. Jack strides after Will, but stops before he reaches him. They talk to each other from opposite sides of the driveway. The tension in Jack's back shouts out his desperation even

from this distance, but Will is harder for Hannibal to read: are his fists, white-knuckled around the dogs' leashes, a sign of distress or defiance? Does he spy solidity or surrender in the faraway curve of his shoulders?

Hannibal's consciousness shifts, and the Hannibal of Wolf Trap briefly transforms into the Hannibal of Maryland Misericordia Hospital. He realizes he should have known, at this moment, that something was amiss: Will's inner life was not usually so closed to him. Hannibal of Wolf Trap understood this scene to be the parting of the ways between Will and Jack, but Hannibal of Maryland Misericordia realizes it is something different: a preparation for battle.

He puts hindsight away and returns to the memory unfolding. Will stands in the cheerful crush of dogs as he watches Jack drive off, the receding taillights momentarily casting him in a bloody light. After the cars disappear, he remains where he is, unmoving. What thoughts now effervesce inside that wonder of a mind? Hannibal wishes he were closer, is almost tempted to press himself against the windowpane in an effort to *see*.

The spell breaks; Will unfreezes. He leads the dogs up to the porch. Sounds of him unsealing and unlocking the door, the scuffling of the dogs excited by the familiar smells of the house. Will crosses the threshold of the darkened room. He doesn't see Hannibal immediately. But Hannibal sees him.

Will is altered. The shock of Alana has wrought in him a change that is both subtle and total. It is as if an entire layer of his skin has been ripped away, and the translucent remainder exposes everything tender and unspeakable inside him. Now Hannibal can perceive within Will a clear light struggling to burn. Though it has been whipped by wind and stifled by rain, the light burns on, suffusing Will's face and hands in a rare glow. Previously Hannibal had only glimpses of this light, enough to know of its existence but nothing more. But now the barrier between Hannibal and Will—which over time, with testing and with force, eroded down to almost nothing—that film of gossamer has been finally and irrevocably breached, and in its collapse this light is now made plainly visible to Hannibal. Is this why he killed Alana? To bring about this miraculous thing, this metamorphosis? Hannibal wonders if her death has worked a similar transformation in himself. He would need Will's eyes to tell.

(And the Hannibal of Maryland Misericordia wonders if this too is an act: this light, this woundedness. But no, how could a thing this startling, this private, be anything but real? It is possible the light was the only true thing Will chose to show him that evening.)

When Will finally sees him, the light flickers.

"You're inside my house," he says.

Hannibal interprets this as a question, and answers it by not answering it.

Not good enough for Will. "You're inside my house," he says again.

(With his wiser eyes, the Hannibal of Maryland Misericordia scrutinizes Will and deems his expression a very fine approximation of surprise. So fine it's probably genuine. For all Will's

knowledge, his predictions, the hair-trigger accuracy of his imagination, he is still surprised to find Hannibal here. Surprised to be proven right.)

"*Why* are you inside my house?" By the trembling scope of Will's voice, Hannibal understands that he is posing this question to God, not to Hannibal. Which is why Hannibal deigns to answer it.

"I like your house."

He hopes the banality of this statement will shock Will, and it does. Will's eyes, always wide, go wider still.

Hannibal remains doubly aware as the scene plays out. He fancies that beneath Will's shock he can sense him readying himself for the next play, and the play after that—but this may be Hannibal's imagination. There isn't even so much as a hairline crack in Will's mask.

"*I want you out of my house*!" he shouts broken-voiced, pointing at the door.

But in the end he has to accept that Hannibal is really there, and will remain there for as long as Hannibal wishes. Will makes this acceptance seem like an effort it's not. His performance is seamless, but that doesn't stop Hannibal from trying to work his fingers into the seams to rip the suit apart. He wishes he could stand up, extinguish the distance between himself and Will, look right into Will's eyes and see through the performance once and for all. But that would destroy the integrity of the memory.

Instead he sticks to the script, bids Will to follow him to the back porch where they secure the dogs together. Will obeys without a peep. Hannibal tests him by leaving Will alone on the porch for a minute, and is gratified when he doesn't attempt escape. He knows Hannibal's mind perfectly, understands a struggle would be messy and useless. (And what would be the point, when Will set and baited this trap before he even stepped through the threshold of his house? He can afford to look innocent now; he has dignity enough to feign defeat.)

The two of them reconvene inside the kitchen.

"When did you last eat?" Hannibal asks him.

"No," says Will.

Hannibal takes this as an invitation to make him eggs. And all the while Hannibal of Maryland Misericordia uses his eyes to screw an auger of curiosity into Will. Will looks back at him, his eyes unblinking and almost robbed of color as they follow Hannibal's every move. Looking at them, Hannibal can't divine even the smallest detail of Will's true intentions. It is like staring into a mirror that reflects nothing—an insatiable void that, having swallowed all available light, reflects only darkness.

Will refuses the food Hannibal gives him. He does more than that. He flings the flatware against the wall: first his own plate, then Hannibal's. When Hannibal still won't wield the linoleum knife, Will appropriates it instead, wrenches hard at Hannibal's hair as he holds the tip of the blade to his cheek.

(An act, all an act, every part of it an act.)

Hannibal looks up into Will's face, feels against his skin the hot insistency of Will's breath, the linoleum knife twitching in the narrow space between them. Will is giving Hannibal what he knows Hannibal expects to see. If he had eaten and remained calm, if he had followed Hannibal's instructions and appeased Hannibal in every respect, then eventually Hannibal would have recognized the lie for what it was. So instead Will gives him this fury like a baited hook for Hannibal to swallow. How tempted he is to swallow it, even now.

"You had a choice," Will rages. "I didn't. You chose to kill her. That was all you. You can't put this on me. I won't take it."

"You already have," says Hannibal.

And the knife comes closer, resting against his bandaged cheek. Hannibal removes the bandage from his bite to diffuse Will's anger. Confronted by the evidence of his own destructiveness, Will abandons violence (for now) and sits back down at the table.

The briefest flash of something maybe real when Hannibal tells Will what he assumed at the time to be true: that Will has retired from the FBI and refused Jack's offer of joining Hannibal's manhunt.

As Will asks, "What makes you think I rejected Jack?" all of the emotion on his face disappears, and for a heartbeat it is revealed to be the calculated mask that it is. The Hannibal of Wolf Trap mistook Will's reaction for a stricken nerve, but the Hannibal of Maryland Misericordia knows this moment is in actuality Will's test for Hannibal, just as out on the back porch Hannibal had tested Will. Will wants to see if Hannibal has taken the bait. He wants to ascertain just how hooked is his fish.

"You came home early," Hannibal tells him. "Without your gun. And I was watching you when you talked with Jack in your driveway. He had the look of a man struggling under the weight of disappointment."

(Ah, poor ignorant Hannibal of Wolf Trap, patiently enumerating all the ways in which Will has already succeeded in fooling him. The fish is very hooked indeed.

He appreciates Will's bravery now. To walk into this house unarmed, in full knowledge of what awaited him inside. Exposing himself and his dogs to the danger Hannibal poses to them. How could Will have known Hannibal wouldn't hurt them? How could Will have known anything for certain, when Hannibal so often finds himself to be an unknowable quantity? Does Will know something about Hannibal that Hannibal is unaware of in himself?)

Click click click, the linoleum knife rocks against Will's knee.

Hannibal attempts to get through to Will, to guide him gently towards his desired outcome for this meeting. Methodically he invalidates every path open to Will—the FBI, boat motors—steering him towards the only remaining avenue that leads to freedom. Will won't hear it. He

rages again. Throws down the linoleum knife in front of Hannibal. Not surrender—a rebuke. And then he storms back into the living room.

"I don't need this!" he shouts. "I don't fucking need this! Do what you came here to do. I'm through talking to you."

Hannibal looks down at the linoleum knife. Brave strange Will, as perverse as Hannibal, returning him this weapon.

And now Will is alone in the living room, unwatched for a few precious seconds. (What does he use them for? Does he slip the mask off? Does he send Jack a message, confirming the fish has taken the bait? Here Hannibal pushes against his recollection's boundaries: he can't know for certain what transpired in the other room. No matter how many times he replays this memory, that information is lost to him.)

Hannibal takes the linoleum knife and follows Will. There he is, in the same chair Hannibal was sitting in all afternoon. His shoulders are bowed, his face in his hands; every line of him now screams defeat.

"Freedom," Will mutters. "Hilarious, how much you love talking about my freedom. You, of all people, have no interest in me being free."

"That's all I've ever wanted for you."

"You put me in a cell!"

"Yes."

"And you don't see a contradiction there?"

"No."

The light in Will is pulsing now, as if trying to escape the corded confines of his body. From the safety of his old armchair he looks up at Hannibal, hands cupped in his lap, eyebrows drawn, an unspoken plea on his lips. A flood of desperate longing is building up inside Hannibal—inside both Hannibals. Wolf Trap wants to save Will, Maryland Misericordia wants to be him.

"I never put you in prison," Hannibal says, and he finds his throat tight, the vocal chords struggling, as if he is approaching the limit of words allotted him. "I set you free."

"I…don't…feel…*free*."

The light is brightening, brightening. Hannibal, a moth drawing closer and closer to the flame. He kneels before Will, grasps his arm, but Will can't stand to be touched and pulls away, ducking out of Hannibal's reach.

"You don't make people better," he cries, up and pacing the living room like a captured animal. "You destroy them. You are a monster. *A. Monster*."

His voice is thick with violence of the most intimate flavor. It isn't loathing. It's self-loathing. It makes Hannibal's whole body pound with feeling.

"I'm not a monster, Will."

Will laughs brutally at this.

"'Monster' is a word people use for something they can't understand. But you understand me."

"Well," says Will, with a half-hearted shrug that tears at Hannibal, "I guess I'm a monster too."

It's the crux of the matter. Tears streak Will's face. The light in him is now so bright it's becoming hard to look at. (And how can this be an *act*? How can something so raw and unguarded be a fiction? Hannibal doesn't pursue this line of questioning. Maryland Misericordia has stopped analyzing; now Maryland Misericordia is just along for the ride.)

He wants Will to stay like this forever, quaking with the pain of being pushed to his limits. Will in extremity has always been indescribably beautiful to him. Hannibal yearns to tell him so. Hannibal wants to capture his feelings for Will under a yoke of words, a last ditch effort to control them. The descriptive language he finds is not quite right, doesn't capture the essence. His chest feels tight, his body locking up around this deluge of emotion. He clings to what he knows and to what he now must do. Take Will with him. Run away.

He broaches the topic, demonstrates his sincerity by dropping the linoleum knife. (A tactical error, the effects of which Hannibal is still feeling, though the pain of his injury can't reach him in the palace). The bright swoop of Will's eyes as he tracks the path of the weapon, but in an instant his attention is back on Hannibal, as if the knife's location is of no interest to him.

"Come with me," says Hannibal.

"You've been so lonely," Will says, his voice faraway, swept up in Hannibal's current, "for so long."

"So have you."

"And you think this will help?"

"*Yes*."

Again Hannibal draws closer to Will. He wants to say something eminently persuasive, the crowning glory of his argument, a final push that might render his offer undeniable. But for once in his life, the words won't come.

He is very close now. A tear clings to Will's eyelashes. Hannibal wonders if he is close enough for the light to shine on Hannibal also, if he might in some way reflect its radiance. He wonders if it is possible to get so close that he might feel its heat. He leans in, wanting to feel it, needing to taste it, his lips to Will's, taking Will's breath for his own as if by doing this

he might coax the light out with the breath, draw all of it into his own body with the suction of his tongue and his teeth and his insurmountable desire.

Will molds himself against Hannibal, kisses him back. Unexpected.

And then the dogs are barking.

Hannibal breaks the kiss. The mask is gone, the performance over. (Encore encore.) The real Will looks at Hannibal with victory shining in his eyes, and from there it is a short leap to what happens next: their struggle, the crack of Will's breaking wrist, the race for the linoleum knife. But the contest has already been decided, was decided from the moment Hannibal broke the kiss, looked at Will, and *understood*. It was then that Will really stuck the knife in him.

Click click click. Linoleum knife tapping at a kneecap. But that can't be: the linoleum knife is currently lodged in Hannibal's guts as Will saws and saws and saws.

Click click click. An electronic chime sounding. These sounds aren't native to the memory palace.

A disorienting wrench as Hannibal abandons Wolf Trap. As a rule he tries to avoid exiting his palace without first retracing his steps through the galleries, the main hall, and the foyer, but this time an exception must be made.

Under the blanket his wound is throbbing, and where it doesn't throb it itches: a sign of healing, but nonetheless very hard to tolerate.

Click click click.

Hannibal doesn't move or alter the rhythm of his breathing, but he cracks his eyes a sliver.

A nurse in full surgical scrubs is standing near the wall opposite his bed. Her face is obscured by her paper mask, her red curls buried under her bouffant cap. She is standing well back from him in order to get the widest possible angle with her camera. *Click click click* goes the shutter.

"Miss Lounds," says Hannibal, and with a gasp she jerks and ruins her shot, "up to your old tricks, I see."

Her eyes widen above her mask. She reaches up, pulls it under her chin. "How did you know it was me?"

"The operating rooms are in the other wing, your manicure is hardly compatible with the duties of a surgical nurse, and you are taking photographs of me without my permission, which I consider to be very rude."

Freddie Lounds doesn't look chagrined in the slightest. "I don't need your permission for photographs, Dr. Lecter. You're in the public eye now. Exposed for all to see. Say cheese."

This time the flash goes off. Hannibal has the courtesy to smile, faintly. “I am resigned to my role as a public figure,” he says. “Though this is not the exposure I had in mind.”

“It isn’t for you to decide how you’re represented, Hannibal the Cannibal.” She lowers the camera with a smirk.

“Is that what you’re calling me?”

“Oh, I’ve been calling you a lot of things. But I admit ‘Hannibal the Cannibal’ is my favorite. I’ve always been susceptible to a good rhyme. Don’t you like it?”

As it happens, Hannibal does like it, though not for any of its intrinsic qualities; he merely has affection for it because of the circumstances in which he first heard it spoken: in a back room of the Baltimore State Hospital in the dead of night.

He doesn’t tell Freddie any of this, obviously.

“I consider the levity distasteful. But it’s better than ‘The Chesapeake Ripper’.”

“What’s wrong with ‘The Chesapeake Ripper’?” Freddie asks, avid eyes focused on him. She was not expecting this, Hannibal awake and receptive to talk. But she hides her surprise well, and pushes the conversation forward for all she’s worth.

“Derivative,” sniffs Hannibal, simply.

“And you’re nothing but original, huh?”

“I try to be.”

He regards her carefully, and she returns his stare without fear. He recognizes her curiosity, applauds it. She is attempting to place this invalid she beholds in front of her, comparing him with both the erudite man of her previous acquaintance and the prolific killer whose doings she so faithfully recounted on her blog. He is neither of those men, and both.

“I hear you’re going to live,” she says, finally.

“So they tell me. They have saved my life so they might take my freedom from me.”

Freddie crosses her arms against her chest. “It’s more than you deserve.”

Hannibal tilts his head. “Judging me so quickly, Miss Lounds?”

“You killed someone I cared about. And you killed Alana Bloom, whom I always respected, self-righteous goody two-shoes though she might have been.”

The faintest smile from Hannibal. “So you haven’t forgiven her for escorting you out of the Baltimore State Hospital?”

“‘Escorting’ me?” Freddie scoffs. “She threw me down the front steps. I could have filed charges.”

“She was protecting Will Graham. You weren’t on his approved visitors list.”

“Well, now I know why you didn’t try to stop her. Couldn’t have me talking to Will Graham. You’d have been running the risk that I might have actually *listened* to him.”

“That would have been inconvenient,” Hannibal agrees.

Freddie smiles, taking these words as the compliment they are. Her bright bird’s eyes skate downward, from his face to his body. “They say you were gutted like a fish—is that true?”

“See for yourself.” And without hesitation Hannibal throws back the blanket to reveal the whole sorry package: his wound, the dressing, the tubing, the drain.

Freddie’s mouth drops open just a little. Her fingers tighten around her camera.

“Will Graham did that,” Hannibal says solemnly, “with a linoleum knife.”

Freddie can’t stifle the reflex to raise the camera.

“You won’t have a good angle from there,” says Hannibal. “Why don’t you come closer? I promise I won’t bite.”

It’s too good an offering to refuse. She edges forward, eyes wide, though what threat can he pose her, weakened as he is, tied down by IV lines and catheters? But this show of fear delights him. She raises her camera as a barrier between them, takes photo after photo of his colostomy bag.

“Take one of my face,” says Hannibal.

She looks up, features drawn with excitement and alarm, predator and prey intermingled.

He encourages her with a nod.

She raises the camera, frames the shot. He stares into the lens, unsmiling, but lets a bit of life flare up in his eyes. *Click*.

“Why are you being so cooperative?” Freddie asks him, and she can’t purge the discomfort from her voice.

“The way I see it, we’re in the same business.”

Her eyebrow lifts. “Criminal justice journalism?”

Hannibal dismisses this with a look. “You and I are nature’s opportunists, Miss Lounds. We both feed off murder.” And before she can protest, “Also I must confess, I have always been an avid fan of your website. You’ve enjoyed my work unapologetically, and your writing communicates that enjoyment to your readers.”

“Well,” says Freddie, a little at a loss, “I’m flattered.”

“For obvious reasons I haven’t been able to make my appreciation public, so I have had to find ways to communicate it to you privately.”

She cocks her head. “Is this the moment when you confess to being ‘A Modest Proposer’?”

“Yes,” says Hannibal, a little miffed she has beaten him to the punch.

“Jonathan Swift.” Freddie chuckles. “You really think you’re hilarious, don’t you? So you were my informant. My insider on the Chesapeake Ripper investigation. The information you shared with me was invaluable, I must admit, though now that I know you were the Chesapeake Ripper all along, I’m annoyed you didn’t give me a lot more than you did. But still, you helped me light a bonfire under Jack Crawford and I’m appreciative of that.”

“I’m happy to hear it,” says Hannibal. He is enjoying this: finally being able to take credit for his doings. The opportunity to speak to Freddie Lounds with almost-honesty. There is an airy relief in this freedom of expression. It was the one freedom he lacked when he was on the outside, and now it is the only freedom left to him. Will the trade be worth it? Time will tell.

After a moment he says: “I’d like to ask you for a favor.”

“I’m listening,” says Freddie, eyes wary, though Hannibal can tell she is mentally performing a cost/benefit analysis.

“The last photo you took,” he says. “May I see it?”

She just blinks at him.

“The photo of my face. Would you mind showing it to me?”

Her fingers tighten on the body of the camera. She senses a ploy. “Why?”

“I don’t have a mirror,” says Hannibal.

Slowly she approaches him, completely guarded, clutching the camera to her chest. If she valued her life above all, she might have handed him the camera and backed away. But Freddie values the story more than her life; she can’t surrender the camera to him for fear he might delete the pictures. Instead she leans down next to him so that she is almost resting on his pillow, and holds the camera display out in front of both of them.

“A little closer, please.”

She brings the screen nearer his face. He focuses his eyes on the bright pixels. Is that him? That skeleton with sunken eyes and gray bristles of beard? His skin is like crumpled paper; he looks fleshless, older, a stone’s throw from death. A stranger even to himself.

“What do you see?” Freddie asks him, not quite gently.

Hannibal isn’t prepared to answer. “What do you see?” he asks instead.

Her answer is immediate. “A monster.”

“A monster,” he repeats, considering it. “Very well. Thank you.”

Chapter End Notes

You can always visit me at my memory palace: after-the-ellipsis.tumblr.com.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Hannibal slips.

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the delay. I was on vacation and had to leave my memory palace untended for a while. But now I'm back and hopefully will be returning to a regular posting schedule. So on with the show!

At the end of his third week of wakefulness, his doctors reverse his colostomy. His innards are his own again, for all the good they do him. He can manage only soft food: broth, applesauce, gelatin, and a saccharine slop the nurse informs him is ‘tapioca pudding.’ As he forces down a tasteless spoonful he thinks of gazpacho, vichyssoise, congee, and panna cotta; what a paucity of imagination that the best they can do for him is this ‘tapioca.’ But he eats whatever they bring, leaves his plastic tray picked clean. He needs his strength. The pain is worse now that he is without the steady drip of liquid morphine.

He journeys to the bathroom with the aid of a walker and two nurses. Try as he might he can’t unbend his spine from its thirty-degree angle, his legs tremble, and every sharp breath catches in his wound, but he makes it, red-faced and grunting. Once he’s there, he hardly has the strength to use the facilities he has so pushed himself to reach.

Even with a railing and a stool he still requires the nurses’ help to wash. Their touch on his irritated skin is impersonal but gentle, and although he tells himself this may be the last human contact he experiences that isn’t colored by revulsion, his pride still smarts at being so obviously in need of assistance, at having his emaciated body exposed for the nurses to see and handle. Perhaps it was better when he was fully invalided, too weak to raise his head. It had been easier, then, to embrace the limits imposed by his condition. But this halfway state is maddening, his independence close enough to tantalize while still being outside his shaky reach.

Once he is clean, the nurses remove the waterproof dressing around his midsection. For the first time he sees his wound in all its glory. An angry slash from his right hipbone all the way across his abdomen, curving up to notch his ribcage on the left side, where it meets the incision left by the surgeons in the removal of his damaged spleen. Hannibal traces the staples with his fingertips, mapping the wound until he reaches the precipitous jut of his ribs.

“A fine piece of work,” he says quietly.

The nurses assume he is complimenting the surgeons.

“You’re very lucky,” Marta tells him. “Stab wound like that, never seen anything like it before.”

“You were almost in two pieces when they brought you in,” say Elodia, as she unwinds more gauze. “And now you’re our very own medical miracle.”

A medical miracle. Imagine that. Hannibal manages a brave smile for his nurses. Despite their better judgment, both women have grown fond of him. He has survived the astronomical odds while being neither moody nor demanding; he speaks to them in their native languages, asks after their children, and suffers greatly in the politest of silences. Whatever he might have done in his former life, however villainous he’s being painted now, to these nurses he is nothing but a model patient.

The guards aren’t so well disposed towards him. Now that Hannibal looks unlikely to die, the FBI agents insist on putting him in restraints whenever possible, an absurd precaution when he barely has the power to stand. They watch him with paranoiac fervor, refusing to answer any of his questions and forbidding him access to newspapers, television, computer, or phone. The guards chastise the nurses for even talking to him, so intent are they on their dehumanization campaign. Clearly they intend to stew him in his own boredom—but they don’t know about the memory palace.

He spends most of his time there, reliving succulent meals, magnificent operas, conversations with perfumed women, moonlit strolls along the Arno. Often he is content simply to wander the galleries, admiring the artwork that contains his memories. Sometimes he doesn’t get past the main exhibit hall, where he remains for hours reveling in his own bloody artistry.

But the greatest portion of his time in the memory palace he spends in Wolf Trap. Over and over he replays the memory from beginning to end, enduring the trauma of his evisceration for the sake of everything that precedes it: the light, the tears, the kiss. These happenings are not a comfort so much as they are a puzzle he feels he has to solve. If only he could sound the depths of Will’s performance, expose the truth that lies at its very bottom. Then he might find some peace.

Wolf Trap is his best distraction in those moments when he needs an escape. Such escapes have never been more necessary, for his physical therapy has begun. He is prescribed long painful walks up and down the hallway of the secure ward, always under the supervision of both guards and nurses. Hannibal’s progress is much slower than he’d like. He aches all the time now, not only his wound but also the atrophied muscles of his arms, legs, and back. Every day he has to relearn the limits of his graceless body, and he is always surprised when

exhaustion descends on him suddenly, brutally. He sweats and trembles, the walker taking most of his weight, but as his body suffers these indignities, his mind remains in Wolf Trap.

This time they tell him he need go no further than the nurses' station, but Hannibal pushes himself further than that, puffing hard, propelling the walker forward in creaky micro-steps so the staples won't pull at him so much. Meanwhile Will sits with grim anticipation at the kitchen table, watching as Hannibal makes eggs.

He says, "What you mourn is the loss of your possessions, your comfortable life of lavishness and luxury."

"I haven't the slightest feeling about the life I left behind," Hannibal corrects him. "It was a dream I enjoyed the dreaming of. Now I am awake."

His IV stand squeaks as Elodia wheels it after him, lathering him with encouragement, which Hannibal pretends to appreciate. The two guards flank him, glaring, as if silently accusing Hannibal of feigning his weakness to lull them into the illusion of security. Alas, it's not an act. Hannibal wishes it were. He wishes he were concealing from the guards vast reserves of unguessed strength. But he can't afford to hold anything back during these sessions. He must test his endurance systematically, mercilessly, if he is ever to regain his power.

In Wolf Trap Will is crying. "The only reason I can't go back to the FBI—can't go back to boat motors—is because you've ruined me. You've ruined me for doing anything else."

"I haven't ruined you," Hannibal says, emotion rearing up in him, muffling his exhaustion in the outer world.

"You have." Will's lips quiver. "You have."

Hannibal is so enraptured that it takes him a moment to realize that Elodia has stepped aside to talk to an attendant, and that one of the FBI agents is leaning into Hannibal's personal space, speaking in his ear as Hannibal continues prodding the walker forward.

"You know," says the agent—he's the one with chewing tobacco on his breath—"Eric Rutgers was my friend."

Hannibal throws the man a sidelong glance, but his attention remains on Will, pacing desperately in his living room, his face twisting in agony as he says: "You don't make people better. You destroy them. You are a monster. *A. Monster*."

In Maryland Misericordia Hospital, the agent steps in front of Hannibal's walker. "He was one of my oldest friends at the Bureau."

Who was? Oh, this man Rutgers. Hannibal could step out of Wolf Trap, return to the Baroque galleries of his memory palace and retrieve the information regarding the identity of Eric

Rutgers and Hannibal's part in his death, but Hannibal isn't interested in making these connections at the present moment. He would rather step closer to Will, press his lips to Will's, breathe Will in and make Will his.

But the guard won't let him be. "I was the best man at his wedding. And now his wife—well, she's a mess. Thanks to you."

His voice is like the persistent buzzing of a fly: meaningless droning but impossible to ignore completely. Hannibal pulls himself out of the memory palace just long enough to favor this pest with an expression of dismissal.

"Agent Rutgers," he says (for now he has placed the name: Rutgers was half of the protective detail assigned to Hannibal after Beverly Katz's faked assault; a well-trained agent, considerate of Hannibal's time and space, Rutgers's only flaw had been an unchecked obsession with automobiles—fascinated by the Bentley, he had pelted Hannibal with all manner of questions about its engine and performance, to the point of becoming something of a nuisance, so it was with an unhesitating ruthlessness that Hannibal, upon arriving home and realizing Alana was inside his wine cooler, immediately severed Rutgers's spinal cord with one clean break), "was in my way."

Which makes the guard widen his eyes, stunned both by the baldness of this statement and by Hannibal's suddenly acute stare.

"Just as you are in my way now," continues Hannibal. He curbs the walker past the agent with an emphatic grunt, and without further adieu he goes back to Wolf Trap. The dogs are barking and Will has just revealed himself, cold calculation in his expression, the light within him shining bright.

"You were lying to me," whispers Hannibal, hardly believing it even now.

"Role-playing," Will declares, and begins reading Hannibal his rights.

Meanwhile Hannibal's guard gives a low rasp of fury. "Then guess I better get out of your way," he says, and as he takes a step backwards, he kicks the walker sideways. Hannibal, still in Wolf Trap, doesn't notice the walker's new position in time, and he reaches for a means of support that is no longer there.

He slips. He falls, his IV toppling down after him with a terrible screech. Hannibal's chin and stapled abdomen smack against the vinyl floor, his bony knees bouncing hard, his toes curling. Pain like an electrical storm inside him. The nurse screams.

In Wolf Trap he slips, too.

As he and Will both reach for the linoleum knife, Hannibal's control over the memory stutters, only for a blink of any eye, but that blink changes everything. Hannibal's hand fixes around the hilt of the knife. He clutches it in front of him, grabs Will by the throat, and before he is even aware of the magnitude of this reversal, his violent momentum carries him forward and he thrusts himself against Will, pins him to the wall, and plunges the knife into him.

“Oh,” says Will, an almost dreamy exhale. His eyes glaze over. He doesn’t seem to understand.

Neither does Hannibal, but he keeps slicing sideways, opening up Will’s belly one inch at a time. Will reaches up uncertainly, touches Hannibal’s elbow, whether trying to stop him or encourage him Hannibal cannot tell. He curves the knife up, cuts straight through Will’s bowels until the blade hooks around the hard bone of his ribcage. It’s a mirror image of the wound Will was supposed to have given him.

Will’s chin drops. He presses his wet face into Hannibal’s shoulder, wheezing.

“There now,” gasps Hannibal. “There now.”

Will moans against him.

“It’s over. It’s all right. Nothing to fear any more.”

He can feel Will’s lips moving against the meat of his shoulder. “Hannibal…” he whispers. “How…does it taste?”

And Hannibal, as if waiting for this signal, pulls the knife out of him. Will winces, stays conscious long enough to watch Hannibal as he licks Will’s insides off the blade. Then Will collapses into him.

People shouting, strong hands clutching his shoulders, turning him over, the urgent shriek of his IV stand being pulled upright. Smears of blood on the yellow vinyl.

Hannibal catches Will before he can fall, holds him tightly. He presses Will’s wound against his chest as if he might use his own flesh to keep Will’s together, as though by close contact they might share this wound and its attendant suffering. And even as Jack enters the house and shouts at him to step away, Hannibal refuses to part himself from Will. Surrounded by shotguns, blasted with searchlights, deafened by helicopter rotors, Hannibal still keeps his hold. He won’t let Will fall. Never.

“Can you hear me?” Elodia is asking him. “Dr. Lecter? Breathe now. Breathe.”

And Misericordia knows this is no longer *quid pro quo*, tit for tat, reciprocity. When Will finished gutting him, he dropped Hannibal, flung him away like a thing separate from himself, untethered, discarded. But heedless of the asymmetry he is now creating, Hannibal keeps Will close, one of his hands still clutching the linoleum knife, its flat side pressing harmlessly against Will’s back. Hannibal touches his face to the skin of Will’s neck so that he can feel Will’s pulse beating out its litany against Hannibal’s cheek, Will’s indefatigable heart still pumping blood through his arteries only for it to drain out of his wound and on to Hannibal, drenching him. He watches as Will’s eyes slip shut, the light inside him guttering, flickering, fighting for life and then growing dim—

Hannibal can’t hang on. It’s too much, the pain too great. The nurses have him on a gurney now. There’s blood in his mouth, blood dripping from where the IV ripped out of his arm, blood oozing from the staples in his gut. His hospital gown is twisted up, revealing his

wasted thighs shuddering with the aftershocks of pain. Elodia notices his nakedness and hurries to straighten the gown. Hannibal feels grateful to this woman, who takes the time even in emergency to preserve his dignity. The FBI agent makes a show of stepping back to give the nurses room to work. He looks appalled by what he's done, and yet his mouth is frozen in a smirk.

Hannibal catches the guard's unrepentant eye. He wonders if the man carries a business card.

There are tests for concussion, ultrasounds to check for internal bleeding, consultations with his surgeons who remove and replace some of the staples. Eventually the doctors pronounce him undamaged by his fall, but the physiotherapist eases back on the length and frequency of Hannibal's walks and lectures him on the dangers of pushing himself too far too soon. Marta bandages his new wounds, switches Hannibal's IV to the other arm, and his recovery continues apace.

He isn't interested in any of these mundanities. The physical aftermath of his fall can't be helped and doesn't much concern him. He isn't even particularly troubled by the continued presence of the FBI agent responsible for his inglorious tumble. Patrick Green (Elodia is kind enough to inform him of the man's name) continues to treat Hannibal with hostility, his thirst for vengeance unslaked by his actions in the hallway. Hannibal feels no answering thirst within himself. He endures the man with the same patience as before. He can do nothing about Patrick Green except take note of the man's name, and within the walls of his memory palace that name becomes a business card, embossed and silver-margined. Hannibal slips this business card into the Rolodex that lives inside Francis Bacon's *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* and then washes his hands of the matter. With freedom comes possibilities. Without freedom he must wait.

His real grievance with Patrick Green has nothing to do with his ruptured staples or his battered dignity. What gnaws at Hannibal is the inadvertent damage the man caused Hannibal to perform on Wolf Trap. In that moment of weakness Hannibal adulterated the memory. He had let a single blood drop fall in its sea of purity. Oh, there was no denying the new version of the scene was stirring, utterly compelling—even now Hannibal cannot help but shiver with the feelings it inspired in him, which linger far longer than the pain and humiliation of his fall. Days pass and he still feels the weight of Will's body cradled against him, bleeding into him, as real as the truth. How strangely satisfying it had been for Hannibal to inscribe his wound on Will's flesh, to pour out his pain into the other man's body; in retrospect he feels he not only succeeded in reversing the circumstances of his evisceration, he also improved upon them unquestionably. He hankers to see Wolf Trap turn out that way again. It would be so easy to slip back into his memory palace and make that little adjustment one more time, just one more time—

No. He must resist. This impulse to alter Wolf Trap is self-destructive and needs to be quashed. His memory is not an unfinished canvas to be painted over at whim. His memory is his masterpiece and it is all he has, so it must be hermetically preserved, locked and shielded from light and air, the dust kept forever at bay. There is space inside his mind for fantasy in

all its wild formulations—but that playground is not inside the memory palace. The palace is his record and testament, inviolate, eternal. A man is the sum of his memories, after all. Wolf Trap must remain Wolf Trap.

"*How does it taste*?" Will whispers into him. A siren call.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

There's no place like home.

They won’t tell him where he’s going, but without a doubt he is going *somewhere*, and soon. Hannibal sees it in his doctors’ detached, tightlipped meticulousness as they check him over, recognizes it from his emergency room days as the tying up of loose ends before a patient discharge. They submit him to a final battery of scans and hum with approval over the results: they say he is healing faster than expected. Hannibal is flattered to think so, but he suspects the hospital is simply anxious to be rid of him. His FBI guard multiplies by the day. There are four of them now, enough for a game of canasta.

But the biggest piece of evidence that his hospital stay is coming to a close is what Hannibal feels taking root inside his own body. Even as he lies in bed, splayed like a fluttering insect under four-point restraints, he can feel unrefined strength pooling in his legs and chest, slowly coiling in his deltoids. At night when a syrupy almost-silence descends on the ward, Hannibal listens to the sounds his body makes in the dark, the stuttering of his digestion, the whistle of his breathing, the hiss of his flesh knitting itself back together like a zipper pulled in the slowest of motion. As recently as a week ago, he was sleeping all the time under the combined influence of medication and exhaustion, but now both are reduced to manageable levels and Hannibal finds himself capable of staying awake for twenty-two hours at a stretch. The night nurse asks if he wants ‘something to help him sleep,’ but Hannibal politely declines: what some people might view as insomnia is in actual fact his natural rhythms finally restored.

He spends these extra hours in the memory palace, though he scrupulously avoids Wolf Trap. A sad but necessary precaution; the temptation to tamper with the memory is a burning itch beyond the reach of his fingers. Instead he haunts more restful moments from his recollection: a library in Madrid, a sunset in San Francisco, his office in Baltimore with a glass of Armagnac at his side and the fire guttering.

His FBI guard increases to six, enough to form a volleyball team.

The doctors draw up worksheets on the cleaning and maintenance of his wound, an exercise regime for his continuing physiotherapy, and lastly a diet plan, eight sheets single-spaced. Marta props it up on Hannibal's tray and turns the pages. What he gathers from this dictum is that any foodstuff with a taste, color, or texture is forbidden him.

His guard increases to eight, a number large enough to man the International Space Station, though these men and women perform no task so lofty. They loiter in his room and in the hallway, trade copies of lifestyle magazines pilfered from the visitors' lounge, and occasionally check the tightness of Hannibal's restraints. With systematic politeness Hannibal asks each of the new arrivals for their name and the name of the institution to which at any minute he might be transferred, but they refuse to tell him anything. Infuriating—Hannibal has a right to know which dim reformatory he might be calling home for the foreseeable future.

Normally he would sic his lawyer on Jack to demand transparency, but Hannibal is between representation at the moment. Carlyle Farrington, Esq., a prominent member of Baltimore society, a self-professed gourmand, and a great lover of chamber music, recently resigned as Hannibal's counsel after being informed of what his client has been serving him at dinner parties for the past twelve years. Farrington's loss, as he will soon see. In the meantime Hannibal will have to find a new lawyer with a stronger stomach.

His guard increases to a baker's dozen, and the moment of his departure has arrived. An FBI-employed nurse sedates him in an attempt to render him easy cargo, but it only gives Hannibal a headache and halos the bright lights in his vision. The attendants strap him tightly to a litter, load him onto a hand truck, and like an antique bureau they wheel him off. Marta and Elodia watch him make his exit, but they don't say goodbye. Perhaps the battalion of armed guards has put them off.

In the van, Hannibal asks every member of his escort for their name, compliments the male nurse on his injection technique, and makes idle comments on the route he presumes the driver is taking them. No one is brave enough to engage him in conversation, and none of them lets slip even a fragment of intelligence regarding their destination. But it hardly matters now. One of the drivers has a BSHCI badge clipped to his jacket.

How thoughtful of Jack. Hannibal spends the length of the journey smiling.

Dr. Chilton is waiting for them in the front lobby. He's wearing a satin tie in jade green, an exact match for the color of the wall tiles—knowing Frederick, a deliberate choice. He wants to be his hospital personified. And he is.

"Ah," he says, shuttling over to meet them, working his hands in a series of officious little claps. "Mr. Lecter! Welcome back."

Mister? Hannibal blinks. "Hello, Frederick," he says. "How's the gut?"

Chilton's face twitches as if flicked. "How's yours?"

“Much better, thank you.”

The orderlies prop up the hand truck so Chilton can look at Hannibal head on.

Chilton’s stare is cool and appraising, but it contains no recognition. He looks at Hannibal and doesn’t see the expert psychiatrist with whom he often discussed the hard case of Will Graham into the small hours of the morning—and that is just as well. Chilton would rather Hannibal look as he does now: like an animal scrawny and untamed, strapped down and sedated, a pitiable etiolated thing. Better this than the intimidating man he once knew.

“Feels familiar, doesn’t it?” says Chilton. “Trading hellos in the lobby. All those times you visited our humble hospital, I bet you never expected to be a patient here yourself.”

“On the contrary,” says Hannibal. “I have often entertained the thought that, were I to be institutionalized, I would prefer to be sent here. Under your care.”

Chilton can’t decide if he should be nervous or flattered by this. “Well,” he says, nodding awkwardly, “it seems you have your wish. Take him down.”

The orderlies load him into a gated elevator that smells of urine. Chilton follows after them, a handkerchief tented over his nose.

“You have presented us with a special kind of problem,” he tells Hannibal, as they trundle down the shaft. “Some rather highly placed people in the Justice Department believed it dangerous for you to be remanded here, as your familiarity with this place gives you a certain advantage you might not possess at another facility. But I told them what I’m telling you now: however intimate you may believe yourself to be with the workings of this hospital, Mr. Lecter, I in turn am just as intimate with *your* workings. I personally assured the Director of the BOP that my history with you gives me unique insight into your psychology, to the point where I believe myself to be the only psychiatrist capable of treating you. And the Director agreed with me.”

Hannibal makes no response to this little speech. The elevator has reached its destination; the gate draws aside like a curtain before a show, and Hannibal peers out at the darkened floor suddenly revealed to him.

“This is the subbasement,” says Chilton, observing his reaction. “You don’t recognize it because you were never allowed down here, of course. Will Graham was here, though only for the length of a single day.”

Hannibal continues regarding the subbasement with careful attention, as if he has never seen this place before. (He has.)

“Maximum-security,” he observes, as the guards wheel him out.

“More than warranted,” says Chilton, “considering the enormity of the crimes you’ve been accused of. Don’t tell me you disagree.”

“I don’t see how I could present a danger to anyone inside this hospital,” says Hannibal mildly. He nods down at his weak and bandaged body. “Not in this state.”

Chilton runs his eyes up and down Hannibal, from his bony legs, to his wound, to his eyes. “Hmm. You’d like me to believe that, wouldn’t you?”

From Chilton it is a surprisingly penetrating remark.

Dr. Chilton accompanies them as far as the processing room before leaving the orderlies to their work. The guards keep their plastic tranquilizing guns at the ready as Hannibal is freed from the litter. He can’t hold back a grunt—the straps were very tight, the upright position uncomfortable, and his abdominals have frozen up. The strip search is even more uncomfortable, but he endures it.

When an orderly approaches bearing a folded jumpsuit and undergarments for him, Hannibal finds himself smiling. Remarkable, the palliative effect of a familiar face.

“Hello, Barney.”

The orderly's rounded eyebrows draw together. After a long moment he says, with palpable reluctance: “Dr. Lecter.”

Hannibal is pleased to be acknowledged. Barney has always impressed him as being unfailingly polite.

“You work in maximum-security now?” he asks, as Barney hastily cuts off his Misericordia hospital bracelet with a pair of safety scissors. “A promotion?”

“Just a transfer,” says Barney, quietly. “You need help putting on those clothes?”

“I can manage, thank you.” Hannibal slowly draws the t-shirt over his head, trying not to put undue stress on his healing abdomen. “You asked to be transferred here, didn’t you, Barney?”

“Wanna be where I’m most needed,” mutters Barney, defensive.

“Admirable. You always did like being helpful.”

Now Barney’s jaw clenches, but before he can respond—

“Matthews!” barks one of the other orderlies. “Quit fraternizing with the patient.”

Barney drops his eyes from Hannibal’s. “Sorry, Hector.”

“It’s *Gornergrat* to you, Matthews. Or if that’s too hard for you to say, then how about ‘sir?’ Why don’t you stick with ‘sir’?”

“Yes, sir,” says Barney, eyes still down.

Hannibal suddenly finds the jumpsuit impossible to wrangle. “I believe I may need help with dressing after all.”

As Barney pulls the jumpsuit’s sleeves forward to give Hannibal more room to maneuver, Hannibal whispers to him: “It’s a shame that your dedication goes unnoticed and unrewarded.”

Barney doesn’t look bolstered by the praise; in fact he gives Hannibal a hard, chastising look, and steps away from him the instant Hannibal is fully clothed.

Meanwhile Hector Gornergrat, the head orderly of the maximum-security ward, snaps off his gloves with a flourish. He is tall and broad-shouldered—though not as broad-shouldered as Barney—possessing a heavy lantern of a jaw and remarkable pale blue irises that almost fade into the whites of his eyes. Altogether he is handsome, but in a brutish way that is instantly repellent to Hannibal.

“Let’s get him back on those wheels,” Gornergrat tells Barney.

“I can walk,” says Hannibal.

“On those chicken legs?” Gornergrat snorts. “We don’t have all day.”

Hannibal straightens up, even though it sets fire to his midsection. He raises his chin. “You may handcuff and escort me, but I would prefer to walk to my cell.”

Gornergrat arches his heavy blond eyebrows. He isn’t accustomed to patients giving him permission to handcuff them. “You wanna walk?” he says. “You got it, buddy. We’ll walk.”

So he handcuffs Hannibal’s arms tightly behind his back—murder on his wound—and then around his neck Gornergrat fastens a collar with a long steel rod attached. Barney assists his superior without comment, but Hannibal sees disapproval in his steady eyes.

“All right,” says Gornergrat, with a jiggle of the rod that gnashes Hannibal’s teeth together. “Chop chop.”

With Barney gripping his elbows from behind and Gornergrat steering him by the collar from the front, Hannibal makes his way out of the processing room and into the main hallway of the maximum-security ward. The pace is very slow, but Gornergrat pulls on him like a recalcitrant donkey until Hannibal is limping almost swiftly, trying to ignore the bright sting of his wound. He keeps his head up, his breathing even. There is an ever-increasing tremble in his flanks, but he refuses to stumble.

His eyes are smarting, an aftereffect of the sedative they gave him at the hospital, so it takes Hannibal some time for his vision to adjust to the dim fluorescent lighting of the hallway. He observes the patients in the padded cells he passes, but they are nothing to him but curious blurs. Then he draws level with a certain familiar cell, and he takes in air so quickly it is almost a gasp. There is Will, sitting on the padded floor, straitjacketed and masked with his back to Hannibal, just as he was that night months ago, when he called Hannibal by his first name and put an end to their therapy forever. If he would only turn around…

Hannibal blinks. Not Will. Reality dictates this cannot be Will, and Hannibal's vision is never clouded by the unreal.

The patient in Will's cell turns his head a little towards Hannibal, watches him suspiciously. The patient is a skinny young man with a long equine face. The skin above his mask is yellow-tinged. There must be something the matter with his liver.

"Keep moving," says Gornergrat, shaking the rod so hard Hannibal's chin knocks against it.

Regretfully Hannibal leaves the masked patient behind and continues his slow lumber down the hallway. His shoulder joints are burning now, and he can feel sweat beading at his temples. Barney's grip is becoming more insistent on his arms; he senses Hannibal's strength is failing and he is encouraging him to take some of the weight off his legs. But Hannibal won't be carried or dragged. He will enter his cell on his own two feet or he will not enter it at all.

But the hallway is so very, very long…

"Well, look what we have here," says a voice. "It's the Transylvanian himself!"

Hannibal, with effort, turns his head, and sees Abel Gideon watching him through the glass window of his cell.

Hannibal hasn't the breath to waste on Gideon, so he merely nods a greeting. Meanwhile the orderlies, used to Gideon's provocations, ignore the man completely.

"So is this the new hospital policy?" Gideon calls after them, a greedy shine in his eyes. "One in, one out? Tell me, if *I* were to phone a friend, hypothetically speaking, would you let that friend take my place down here?"

The patient in the cell next to Gideon— a stout older man with a thick white scar across his drooping eyelid—tells Gideon: "You don't have any friends."

Gideon issues up a long-suffering sigh to the ceiling. "True, Louie. Too true."

A buzzer sounds and a door swings open to meet them; finally they have reached the empty cell destined to house Hannibal. Gornergrat chooses this moment to jab the rod attached to the collar—and Hannibal almost tumbles over the threshold. Barney keeps him upright by grabbing his biceps just in time.

"Home sweet home," says Gornergrat. "Hope it's up to your standards."

Every corner of the cell is padded. The bed, desk, and chair are bolted to the floor; the overhead light is greenish and buzzing. The toilet's tank is broken and refills itself nonstop.

The orderlies remove the collar and cuffs, and it is all Hannibal can do to remain upright.

"Put your hands on the wall," Gornergrat orders him. "Matthews, do the honors."

Barney gives Hannibal a final pat down. As he does this, Gornergrat launches into a speech with droning detachment, as if he isn't actually concerned with being heard:

"Keep your cell neat. That's rule number one. A clean cell is a clean mind. We do checks every morning and evening. Lights-out is ten. Lights come back up at six. Your sleeping schedule is monitored and will be shared with Dr. Chilton, so if you can't stick with our hours then you will be medicated. You get three square meals a day and you better eat them; we're watching that, too. Whenever you hear the buzzer, you stand just like that, hands against the wall and don't turn around or else you're gonna get a shot. Are we clear on this, buddy?"

"I know the rules," whispers Hannibal, still breathless.

"No screaming," says Gornergrat, ignoring him. "Scream at us, we're gonna scream right back and you're not going to like that. Ok, you're all set. Keep your hands against the wall until you hear the buzzer."

Hannibal does as he is told, not because he gets any pleasure from acquiescing to this ingrate, but because he wants to be left alone as soon as possible. The buzzer sounds; the orderlies and guards file out. The door closes behind them, and an instant later the lock slides home with the same resounding inevitability as a cymbal clash at the end of an overture.

With one hand pressed to his wound, Hannibal slowly lowers himself on to the chair. Despite its feeble mattress the bed looks by far the more comfortable option, but Hannibal doesn't want the bed. He knows the other patients of the ward are watching him and besides, he has spent the last two months on his back. How wonderful it is to make this small decision for himself: chair, not bed. So he sits by the desk with his back very straight and his hands resting palms down on his knees. He draws his first deep breath of the cell's humid air: he smells bleach, chlorine, mold, dander, and human misery.

Louie, the scarred man in the cell across from Hannibal, is watching him closely. "Something wrong with you? You look sick."

Hannibal shuts his eyes. Keeps breathing in and out. At this moment the temptation to return to Wolf Trap is very strong.

"He looks *starved*," Gideon corrects Louie. "What's the matter, Nosferatu? They not giving you enough people to eat?"

Hannibal cracks his eyes open. From where he's sitting, he can just see Gideon peering at him from his cell down the hall.

"My name," he says, "is Hannibal Lecter."

Gideon says nothing. The authority in Hannibal's voice has silenced him.

Hannibal takes one final steadying breath before extending his arms over the empty desk. Gently he brushes his fingertips against the cool metal. With his eyes closed, he sees the stately bone grin of his harpsichord.

A moment of quiet, except for the hissing of the toilet tank. Then Hannibal spiders his fingers on the desk, the metal surface reflecting his pale hands so that a second pair of hands appears to be reaching out of the desk to meet him. Slowly but with faultless control he plays the first measure. Each note rings out more delicate and plaintive than the last, and they accumulate around him, hovering like a coterie of ghosts.

Abel Gideon, Louie, and all his other new neighbors listen to the silence that is Hannibal's concert. They have never heard anything like this silence before. No silence like this has ever existed inside their hospital.

The Goldberg Variations, of course. Even after Hannibal has stopped playing the harpsichord, the music echoes in his mind and in his cell, a fine golden mist of memory.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Turnabout is fair play.

Living in captivity is an ingrained skill. If a person has been exposed early in life to the extremes of deprivation, the cold rigors of living always at someone else's behest, divested of one's own privacy, privilege, and autonomy, then the captive's mindset—the quiescent dependence of a broken animal—becomes second nature. Even if such a person were to rise above their humble beginnings and transform their life into a springtime of limitless extravagance, captivity still stays with them. Captivity circulates inactive in the bloodstream, awaiting the winter when all luxury is lost, our freedom stripped away, and in that sudden absence of everything, the native memory of captivity reasserts itself inside us, replicates, multiplies, becomes all we have. Our secret anchor.

So it is with pride, but no small amount of dismay, that Hannibal finds himself falling into the rhythms of the maximum-security ward as easily as one might slip into a bath. He marks time by the orderlies' rounds, eats when they bring him food, dresses when they bring him clothes, washes when they escort him to the showers, and allows himself to be manhandled in and out of shackles. He isn't bothered by the many petty annoyances that surround him: the persistent susurration of the toilet tank, the ubiquitous smell of Clorox, the linen carts with squeaky wheels, the buzzing fluorescents, the inmates' occasional shouting fits. Whenever this last occurs, Gornergrat retaliates by wheeling out an old television and playing a video of a spitting televangelist at top volume. The head orderly must have quite the grievance against God if he believes this enforced preaching is a punishment. Admittedly it is rather irritating. The sound quality of the recording is terrible.

At lights-out Hannibal lies down on his bed. At lights-up he wakens if he happens to have fallen asleep. It isn't necessary for him to sleep these hours away. He couldn't if he tried. It is only the appearance of conformity that is important to Gornergrat. The man is the lazy type of tyrant, insisting upon order so long as he doesn't have to work for it. He spends most of his time playing Sudoku in his office, leaving Barney to do the rounds.

Barney serves Hannibal three meals a day of what might as well be colorless gruel, which Hannibal eats without tasting, thinking of the stuff as fuel, nothing more. He burns it up very

quickly, as he spends a great deal of his time on the floor of his cell doing stretches and sit-ups. With his healing wound he must be very careful what he does and how he does it; often his movements are so slow and controlled they appear mechanical. Observing these exercises, his neighbor Louie starts referring to him as “the yogi.” Hannibal supposes it’s apt. He looks the part of the ascetic, bearded as he is and still so very thin.

The inmates try to talk to him at first. Abel Gideon has been keeping up with Hannibal’s press and is brimming over with curiosity. He asks detailed questions about the Chesapeake Ripper murders, wanting to compare notes. (“How do you get the cuts so *clean* while they’re still conscious, that’s what I could never understand.”) He asks what human flesh tastes like. (“And don’t say chicken, we all know chicken doesn’t taste like anything.”) He asks how it felt to kill Alana Bloom. (“Was it *fun*?”) He asks what Will Graham is up to these days.

Hannibal doesn’t respond to any of these questions.

“I don’t know why you bother,” Louie tells Abel in his thick New York accent. “He isn’t gonna talk to the likes of us. Celebrity inmate. Thinks his shit stinks less than ours just ‘cause he got his picture in the papers. I know his type.”

“I don’t think you do,” says Hannibal.

This is one of his only utterances. He is even more careful with his speech than he is with his movements. He feels he must reorder himself on the inside before he is capable of asserting his will over the outside.

How had Will coped in his first days of captivity? Hannibal doesn’t know firsthand; Alana had insisted he stay away from Will until he had ‘time to get his bearings.’ Perhaps there had been an adjustment period when the structured rhythms of this hospital were completely foreign to Will. But perhaps not. Over the course of his imprisonment, Will never let on that the actual physical reality of confinement was any kind of burden on him. It was only the injustice of his situation that rankled. Everything else—the constriction, the boredom, the lack of privacy—he simply endured. And Will had the capacity to endure quite a lot. Hannibal wonders now at it. What is Will’s secret anchor?

With these questions weighing on him, Hannibal returns to Wolf Trap. He can no longer stay away. This isn’t his resolve cracking, or so he assures himself. He returns to Wolf Trap because he must return there eventually and this night—the second night of his stay at the Baltimore State Hospital—is as good a night as any. He is only there for an inspection, to check the foundations of the memory and ensure it hasn’t been in any way damaged by his slip.

So Hannibal is relieved when Will slides the knife into him almost to the grip and carves across Hannibal’s stomach not cleanly, but with a series of ragged little jerks, each one accompanied by Will’s high gasp as if he is wracking himself with Hannibal’s pain.

The memory remains accurate in every detail. Hannibal shouldn’t have been worried. For how could anything so vividly emblazoned on his recollection—and upon his flesh—ever be corrupted? Nothing can alter Wolf Trap. Wolf Trap is made of stone.

With newfound confidence, Hannibal immediately replays the memory and this time he guts Will with the linoleum knife.

Why exactly does he do it? Hannibal cannot say. Perhaps he is simply curious what will happen.

He is gratified when it plays out just as before: he stabs Will and embraces him and observes the look of naked shock on his face as Will's blood pours down between them, consecrating their shoes. The pain and release Hannibal sees in Will's expression is not a forgery. It isn't role-playing. Even though this scenario never happened in reality, Hannibal fancies this is *real* in a way that so much of Will's performance in Wolf Trap was not. And why shouldn't Hannibal be able to experience this? Something real, something honest, the very truth of who Will is, intended for only Hannibal to know and understand.

Why can't he have that? Just one more time.

But one time turns into two, and soon it becomes a habit. Hannibal flips Wolf Trap the way another man might flip a coin. Sometimes Will guts him. Sometimes he guts Will. Often he enters Will's little house with no firm idea of how things will turn out, in whose hand the knife will fall. It's roulette of the mind.

Despite being continuously written and overwritten, the memory of Wolf Trap neither suffers nor fades. In fact, to Hannibal it feels even more alive now, more vital with his every roll of the dice. He used to think of Wolf Trap as an inalterable record, predetermined, embalmed. By predicting Hannibal, Will stuck the knife in him before he even stepped through the threshold of his house. Wolf Trap happened the way it had to happen. But that isn't so. Because Wolf Trap is *still happening*. Hannibal and Will were evenly matched that night. It could just as easily have been Will on the wrong side of the knife. Will bleeding out on the floor. Will prodded by doctors and starved by dietitians. Will living now with this wound, this constant reminder of the man who gave it to him. There is a place in the world for Hannibal and a place in the world for Will, and they can trade those places easily enough. They have before.

Dr. Chilton hums as he flips through the many pages of his clipboard. He crosses his legs, leans back on the folding chair in a pose of affected relaxation. But this jaunty display can't conceal the hospital director's nerves, the way his voice shakes when he insists Barney wall off the hallway with privacy screens. A pointless measure. The other inmates still hear every word. Chilton doesn't want to be alone in a room with Hannibal.

"How are you settling in?" he asks.

"As well as can be expected," Hannibal replies. He sits at the very edge of his bed with his hands folded attentively atop the hard bones of his knees.

This is the first time he has seen Dr. Chilton since their meeting when Hannibal arrived at the hospital. Chilton has postponed Hannibal's therapy until now, claiming he wanted to give his

new patient time to acclimate. But Hannibal knows the real reason for the delay: Chilton was gathering information on Hannibal's mood and habits with which to ambush him.

Here it comes. "The head orderly tells me you haven't been speaking much. I'm surprised, Mr. Lecter. You usually have so much to say."

Hannibal smothers his involuntary twitch at 'Mr. Lecter.'

"I have been conserving my energy," he says.

"For what purpose?"

"So that I might speak with you."

Chilton's eyebrows lift, but he quickly lowers them. Tries to look nonchalant again. "And what is it you'd like to say to me?"

Hannibal is all innocence. "I assume you have questions for me. I want to be able to answer them to the best of my ability."

"I do have questions." Chilton pecks his pen against his clipboard. "Many, many questions."

"Then ask them."

Silence except for the pecking pen and Chilton's nervous blinking. Finally he says: "So am I to understand by this that you have chosen to cooperate with therapy?"

Hannibal tilts his head as if the answer to this question is self-evident. "I have been remanded to your care, Frederick. I am your patient."

Chilton doesn't respond. He looks around at the paper screens, hoping someone might step out from behind them and tell him how to proceed.

"Did you expect resistance?" Hannibal prompts him.

"I…did."

Hannibal dips his head, curious. "Why?"

"In the past," says Chilton carefully, "you have demonstrated a pronounced… lack of regard for the doctor-patient relationship."

Hannibal suppresses the urge to smile. "Have I?"

"Now don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about." Chilton's eyes flash. "You spent a great portion of the last year undermining me. Undermining my ability to administer treatment within this hospital."

"Yes," says Hannibal, simply.

"So you *admit* it?"

Hannibal nods. “We shared a patient. I prioritized my treatment of him over yours. I apologize for any inconvenience it may have caused you.”

“Inconvenience.” Chilton’s voice grows shrill. “Inconvenience! You *misled* me, Mr. Lecter. You misled the psychiatric community at large. You misled the FBI. You led Jack Crawford on a merry chase. And that patient whose treatment you ‘prioritized’ was wrongfully institutionalized thanks to you! He could sue the state!”

Hannibal watches with some satisfaction as Chilton twitches like a fish on the hook. He knows it isn’t the State of Maryland Chilton is worried Will might sue.

“Will Graham won’t be suing anyone.”

Chilton scoffs. “How can you know that? You aren’t in communication with him.” But the jumpiness in his expression asks, *Are you?*

“No,” says Hannibal, as he lets genuine regret slide onto his face and into his voice. “But I can predict his actions just as accurately as he can predict mine. You have nothing to worry about from Will.”

“*I’m* not worried,” say Chilton, annoyed at the insinuation. He gives Hannibal a long, evaluating look. “He certainly predicted *you*. He trapped you like a rat in a maze. I’m thinking that’s an unfamiliar position for you to be in. You so enjoyed playing your tricks on the rest of us. Exerting your power. Well, now it’s your turn to have power exerted over *you*.”

Hannibal is amused by Chilton’s unsubtle attempt at rubbing salt in his wound. But there’s no place in this conversation for Hannibal’s amusement. Instead he lets the regret remain on his face, allows it to set up camp there for the time being.

“Turnabout is fair play,” he says. “I have respect for the instruments of power. I recognize when I am at their mercy.”

“At *my* mercy.” An ugly note of gloating in Chilton’s voice.

Hannibal nods meekly. “I can recognize a situation in which my resistance will have no effect.”

Chilton watches him for a long while, stroking the side of his mouth as he thinks his little thoughts. “I must admit,” he says, “this all seems very reasonable of you. Very reasonable indeed. Patients with your profile usually resist treatment. They fight it every step of the way. Will Graham certainly did.”

“I am not Will Graham,” says Hannibal, more regretfully than ever. “I think of myself as being a very reasonable person.”

Chilton looks interested. “Do you now?”

“Lucid,” continues Hannibal, watching a glint ignite in Chilton’s eyes. “Perceptive.”

“Oh, undoubtedly.”

“In addition, I have a great deal of clinical experience. I’m very well-trained in psychiatry, as you know.”

“And,” says Chilton, “you also happen to be a mass murderer.”

Now Hannibal *smiles*. Which makes Chilton look a funny cross between panicked and delighted.

“I could be a valuable resource to you,” says Hannibal. “My mind coupled with my expertise. It seems likely that through an intensive examination you could learn something interesting from me. Something that might benefit the field. Think of it, Frederick. You’d be like Beaumont studying digestion through the opening in St. Martin’s stomach.”

“Imagine that,” says Chilton, voice hushed.

Hannibal turns reticent again. “Though I feel it prudent to issue a disclaimer. You must understand, Frederick, that I am not overly fond of talking about myself. And I don’t have the perspective to diagnose my own aberrations with any degree of accuracy.”

“Of course you don’t,” declares Chilton. “That would be for me to do. But I would need your cooperation, Mr. Lecter. Your full cooperation.”

“And you will have it.”

Chilton wags a finger. “No resistance. No dissembling. No tricks.”

Another meek nod from Hannibal. “I will attempt to make myself as transparent to you as the fistula aperture in St. Martin’s gut.” And he looks up, spears Chilton with a clear, purposeful stare. “…That is, for the right incentive.”

“Aaaaah.” Chilton leans back in his chair, smacks his clipboard lightly against his own stomach. “I thought we might come to that. And what *incentive* were you hoping for?”

“Nothing that would put you out,” says Hannibal quietly, “or interfere with my therapy. I only ask for a few creature comforts.”

“Name them.”

“A view. What I want is a window. I would like to be able to see the trees and sky, or even water.”

He makes this request knowing perfectly well that this is above and beyond what Chilton can do for him. And sure enough, Chilton shakes his head.

“There are no windows in the maximum-security ward, and maximum-security is where you’re staying. That’s non-negotiable.”

“Ah.” Hannibal feigns disappointment. “I see. Then perhaps something can be done about my meals. The food I have been receiving up until now has been less than satisfactory.”

This, too, earns a sigh from Dr. Chilton. “Your diet plan has been specially calibrated by our in-house nutritionist to meet your needs. I’m sorry if it isn’t worthy of a Michelin star.”

“Ah,” says Hannibal, again. He drops his head like a kicked dog, stares down into his lap. “That is unfortunate.”

Silence. Hannibal waits patiently for the other man to fill it.

“How about this,” Chilton says. “I can provide you with books, newspapers, journals, whatever you need to keep yourself mentally stimulated. That should help make your stay here more comfortable.”

“I suppose,” says Hannibal, as if these things are not at all rewarding to him.

Chilton keeps going. “I could permit you internet access. An hour once a week. All browsing activity monitored by my staff, of course.”

Hannibal nods, accepting this without enthusiasm.

Chilton’s brows creases. He sees he’s dealing with a tricky customer—and he’s not wrong.

“How about this,” he says, leaning forward and pointing his steepled fingers at Hannibal. “When you’ve got your strength back, I can sanction supervised walks in the yard. Twenty minutes, twice a week.”

Now Hannibal looks up, all gratefulness, as if a quick shuffle through the gravel in the hospital courtyard is a veritable gift from God. “Thank you,” he whispers.

Chilton puffs himself up further. “All of this is subject to your good behavior, of course. Not a toe out of line, or I’ll have to reconsider.”

“I understand.” Then, “May I have sketching supplies? Charcoal paper and pencils would be my preference.”

“No pencils.”

“Conté, then.” And at Chilton’s uncomprehending blink, “Crayons. They’re not sharp.”

“You like drawing?” Chilton inquires, unnecessarily.

“It is a hobby I have always found pleasure in, yes.”

“Then the supplies shouldn’t be a problem. Just as long as you allow me to see your work.”

“As you wish, Frederick.”

Chilton's lips go thin. "If you're submitting yourself to treatment, Mr. Lecter, than you had better start calling me '*Doctor* Chilton'."

"Oh, forgive me, Doctor. Old habits die hard. Perhaps it would make things easier for me if you were to start calling me Hannibal."

Chilton thinks about it, then nods. "Hannibal it is."

Hannibal allows himself a smile now, faint and unaffected. A successful negotiation, all in all. Dr. Chilton has unintentionally ponied up to Hannibal everything he wants.

Their sessions proceed predictably along psychometric lines. Chilton sticks to his psychopathological battery, lobbing Hannibal softballs from the Minnesota Multiphasic, the Psychopathy Checklist, the Buss-Perry AGQ, and every other standardized therapeutic assessment tool known to hack psychiatrists the world over. The only part of this that Hannibal finds at all taxing is when Frederick takes him through a Thematic Apperception Test. Chilton sits there like the Cheshire cat, waiting for card Mf 13 to pop up, and Hannibal has difficulty concealing his amusement. But he manages it, and when Chilton shows him the picture of an insensate woman lying in bed with a man standing above her and shielding his face, Hannibal dutifully avoids giving a sexual interpretation. Chilton smirks.

There. Now Hannibal is a sexual deviant in Dr. Chilton's book. He expects he shall have no trouble from the hospital director for the foreseeable future.

Barney approaches the glass with a bundle in his arms.

"Ah, Barney. Is that what I think it is?"

Hannibal lays on his pillow the faded copy of Dumas's *Grand Dictionnaire de Cuisine.* He steps up to the glass, reaches through the food slot, and takes from Barney the plastic-wrapped package of drawing paper and the Conté crayons.

"These will do nicely," he tells him. "Thank you." He deposits the supplies on the only clear spot left on his desk.

Barney surveys Hannibal's cell, now lined with privileges: books and journals, a reading light, unscented hand soap, an electric razor.

"Anything else we can get you?" Barney asks. "Turndown service? A mint?" These questions rather thrum with hostility.

Hannibal raises his eyebrows slowly. He sits down at his desk and examines the orderly with careful attention. "You don't like me much, do you, Barney?"

“It’s not my job to like you, sir.”

“Not your job to hold a grudge, either.”

“Got no grudge against you, Dr. Lecter. You’re here where you belong, and I’m glad for it.” With this, Barney turns to leave.

Hannibal lets him take two steps before addressing his back: “You had a hand in putting me here. And yet I don’t hold it against you. You might offer me the same consideration.”

Barney stops, turns, looks at Hannibal long and hard. “Will Graham caught you.” Hannibal notes the barest hint of pride in Barney’s voice. “I had nothing to do with that.”

“You gave Will Graham a phone. Every event that followed, the good and the bad, can be traced back to you. And your act of kindness. The first of the falling dominos.”

Barney’s eyebrows draw together. He says nothing.

“You’ve never thought of it that way before,” Hannibal says, staring right into him. “That you might be responsible for all of it.”

“You’re responsible for it, Dr. Lecter,” Barney says, quietly.

“Why did you give him the phone, Barney? Why did you trust Will Graham, when almost no one else did?”

Hannibal can’t keep the roughened curiosity out of his voice. The ward lights are dimmed for the night, and in that gloom his eyes—which due to weight loss are larger in his face—seem to glow.

Barney stays steady underneath this stare, but it’s a close thing. “I don’t really know,” he says, a little shake in his voice. “I just had a feeling about him. I have a feeling about you, too.”

Hannibal tilts his head like a lizard. “Pray tell.”

“You’re playing nice now. Just like you used to play nice, back when you were on the outside. Bringing food for the FBI agents, always so polite. Dr. Chilton might be fooled by it, but I’m not. You’re a mean dog, Dr. Lecter, who only wags his tail to get people to come in close enough to bite.”

Hannibal smiles, very very slowly. A chill in the air. “I am not the one who bites, Barney. As you should well remember. Good night to you.”

“Try not to move,” Hannibal tells Alana, for the second time.

“Sorry,” she mutters, eyes twisting up. “Crick in my neck.”

“You’re tensing your shoulders. It all becomes much easier if you relax.”

She tries for his sake. Rolls her neck a little, then settles back down. But Hannibal can still see the tension in her toes, flexing rhythmically against the pooled sheet on the bed. He doesn’t correct her on the toes. He likes them that way.

“This doesn’t come very naturally to me,” Alana says.

He carefully smudges a line of charcoal with the pad of his thumb. “Being looked at? Having your beauty openly appreciated?”

“Being *still*,” she says, giving him a look.

“You’ve never been one for sitting still. Too many projects commanding your attention. Too many causes to champion.”

This makes her sigh. A warning to him. Hannibal moves on.

“But stillness can offer us perspective,” he says. “And peace of mind.”

The candlelight reflects in Alana’s eyes like fairy lights upon a fen. In his drawing Hannibal is attempting to do justice to this effect, with limited success.

“Is that what drawing offers you?” she asks, with a touch of sarcasm. “Perspective and peace of mind?”

“Sometimes. At other times, it’s simply a good excuse to appreciate beauty in its purest form.”

Alana presses her face down on the mattress. “You’ve got to stop calling me beautiful.”

“Only if you stop moving. Please.”

She looks up, a little flushed, smiling teasingly. “All right, all right. I’ll try.”

Oh, he likes that blush. Now he wishes he were working with color, to capture the delicate pink of the blood underneath her skin. Oils. Maybe watercolor. But he dislikes paint as a rule; it doesn’t afford him adequate control.

He had worked with color in the rose garden. Dark reds, deadened whites. Dramatic splashes of hue and shine—and his control over them had been complete.

Hannibal dismisses this thought. Not the time.

“When did you learn to draw?” Alana suddenly asks him. “Did someone teach you?”

He looks up, catches her watching him. Knows she sees his hesitation, now familiar to her from other occasions when she has questioned him about his early history.

“I always demonstrated an aptitude for it, even when I was too young to speak. I remember drawing pictures with my fingertips in the snow in my parents’ garden. But I took lessons later, as a teenager in Paris. Figure drawing.”

Alana raises her eyebrows. “No shortage of figures to draw in Paris.”

Hannibal lets himself smile at this. “Live models made me nervous. I was sixteen and self-conscious. I preferred unmoving subjects.”

She looks up at the ceiling, trying to see Hannibal at sixteen. “I can’t imagine you were ever self-conscious,” she admits. “So what did you like drawing? Landscapes? Bowls of fruit?”

“No. Paintings. I went to the Louvre nearly every day to sketch them. Once I even snuck in after visiting hours.”

Alana can’t help it: she shifts on the bed, her ribs suddenly visible along her naked side as she draws a breath. “You broke into the *Louvre*?”

“You make me sound like a criminal.” Hannibal’s eyes are on the busy shading of her thigh. “I befriended a guard. He let me in through a service door. He took me through the back rooms where they store all the art in their collection not currently on display. An incredible sight.”

“I’ve always wanted to be in a museum at night,” says Alana. She looks more relaxed now, holding her pose without difficulty. “Wandering through the dark galleries, alone with the art. It’s been a dream of mine ever since I was little, when I read *From The Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*.”

“I’m not familiar.”

“It’s a children’s book. About a little girl and her brother who run away from home to live inside the Met. They sleep every night in one of the antique beds. I loved that.”

“Living inside a museum,” he muses. “In constant, intimate communion with the past. An attractive idea.”

“Were you tempted to steal anything? While you were unsupervised inside the Louvre?”

He hums with amusement. “No. Though Nike of Samothrace would make a beautiful addition to my bedroom, don’t you think?”

“Yes.” Alana gives him a little dig of a smile. “If only you could have smuggled it out under your coat.”

“A missed opportunity.” Then he says, “Don’t push it back,” as Alana is about to sweep a stray lock of hair out of her eyes. “Stay just like that.”

She obeys him easily now, no resistance. When she lets her guard down, she is moldable as clay.

“I’ve never understood the point of stealing art,” she says. “I met someone in Art Crime at an FBI event once, and she explained it to me fairly well—that thieves like art because it’s portable capital, easy to use as collateral—but I still don’t really see the value in it from a collector’s perspective. Imagine owning a Picasso you can’t show to anyone.”

“*You* can look at it,” says Hannibal. “For as long as you like, at any time you desire. There’s value in that, isn’t there? Pleasure, too, I imagine, in hoarding something beautiful just for yourself. A secret to keep from the entire world.”

A smile breaks over Alana’s face and suddenly she is laughing, a laugh that shakes her whole body on the bed. Hannibal doesn’t remind her not to move. He sits in his winged armchair, drawing board momentarily forgotten on his knees, and simply watches her appreciatively, his eyes sliding like clear water over every inch of her skin.

“Oh no,” she says. “Is this you building up to telling me you have Nike of Samothrace stashed in your basement?”

He smiles at her indulgently. “I don’t have a basement.” Then, “Would you like to see it?”

She stops laughing. “You’re finished?”

“Oh, I could keep working for hours, changing every little detail. It is as finished as it needs to be.”

He turns the drawing board around. He watches the expression on Alana’s face: the curiosity, the faint embarrassment, the erotic thrill of seeing herself the way Hannibal sees her. She doesn’t quite recognize herself in the drawing. But on some level she wishes she could.

She draws the sheet up over her body as she finishes looking at it.

“It’s…well.” She swallows. “I think you’ve flattered me.”

“Never,” he says, sincerely.

“Is this a present for me?”

Hannibal considers it. Has a better idea. “If you don’t mind, I would like to keep it.”

She breathes a sigh of relief. “Please do.”

He clips it to the drawing board, and then places it on the floor near the bed. He’ll later spray it with a fixative, make sure it doesn’t smudge.

“Hang it next to Nike,” says Alana, and she beckons him to slip under the covers with her.

He stops the memory at this point. Leaves his bedroom, steps out from Artemisia Gentileschi’s *Sleeping Venus*, crosses the Baroque gallery, exits through the main exhibit hall and the foyer beyond it. Eases himself out of his palace and back into his cell in the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

He looks down at the work spread across the desk. The drawing is a very good reproduction: the lines denoting Alana's hair are particularly fine, assured and flowing just as he remembers them. He touches the drawing with his blackened fingertips, smoothing out the contour of Alana's cheek.

Not quite the original, but close enough.

He wedges it underneath his mattress.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Freddie Lounds scores an exclusive.

Chapter Notes

I'll be at Dragon Con this weekend and I'm ever so excited about seeing the Pannibal. If any of you guys are attending, let me know! I'd love to meet some awesome Fannibals. I'm not that scary, promise.

HANNIBAL THE CANNIBAL TRANSFERRED TO HIGH-SECURITY PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL … In an ironic reversal, the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane also happens to be the same facility that housed falsely-accused FBI profiler Will Graham for eight months last year … A spokesman for the FBI assured reporters that Hannibal the Cannibal will still be "prosecuted to the full extent of the law" … Lecter is expected to be charged with "at least fifty" counts of murder in addition to "other felonies we are still investigating" … "We don't currently believe this man is suffering from a mental illness…"

NOTORIOUS CANNIBAL "SPARKLING CONVERSATIONALIST" AT DINNER PARTIES … Society columnist speaks out on infamous Lecter dinners: "People are frightened to come forward, but it's common knowledge that anyone who's anyone in Baltimore has eaten at his table" ... "once served a salad containing what he claimed were sheep's brains; while we ate it he made a joke about how much he'd enjoy a piece of *my* mind" … "I'm worried about the long-term health effects of nonconsensual cannibalism…"

CABLE NEWS PUNDIT ON HANNIBAL THE CANNIBAL: "THAT SICKO… SHOULD BE DEPORTED" … Scarsdale on his morning show had this to say on the case of Hannibal Lecter: “That sicko from Latvia has been killing and eating men and women on US soil” … “we shouldn’t even be harboring him, let alone spending taxpayer dollars on his medical treatment” … “Hannibal the Cannibal ought to be deported, and we should do the same for all immigrants who don’t value American lives.” When his co-host pointed out that Lecter has been a naturalized US citizen for fifteen years and was born in Lithuania, not Latvia, Scarsdale only replied, “Oh, whatever. Ship him back to sender.”

LOTHARIO LECTER AN "ATTENTIVE AND CONSIDERATE" LOVER, ACCORDING TO SOURCES ... Even after split, “he always sent me a birthday present: a bottle of wine of the same vintage as my birth year” … Tremendously generous and prone to grand romantic gestures … Former flame Loretta Lamarre says, “I never had the sense of any monster lurking underneath his handsome mask, but he certainly cultivated an air of mystery that I found very exotic. I liked to speculate with my girlfriends over whether he might be a former spy or exiled royalty, someone with a tragic past he couldn’t bear to speak of”… “He never pushed our relationship beyond that of a casual dalliance. I assumed he was gay.”

MEET THE WORLD’S MOST NOTORIOUS SERIAL KILLER…AND THE BEST DRESSED … Hannibal Lecter, famous cannibal believed to have killed at least forty-eight people, was well-known in Baltimore circles not only for his dinner parties but also for his flamboyant dress sense … fashion experts call him “a modern-day dandy” … Old World elegance … bespoke three-piece suits featuring rich fabrics and shouting patterns … cutaway collars … double Windsor knots … paisley … “Tailoring so sharp you could cut yourself just by looking at it” … Click here for slideshow!

CANNIBAL SHRINK GOADED PATIENTS TO KILL … New information that sheds further light on the extent of Lecter’s criminal behavior … reads like nothing so much as the elaborate machinations of an evil mastermind … perjured himself in court on multiple occasions … falsified patient records … believed to have concealed life-saving medical information from at least one patient … may be responsible in part for the deaths of several others… Lecter obtained wrongful access to his own FBI investigation … used his privileged intimacy with the case to tamper with evidence … is currently under investigation for forty-two murders and an additional eight disappearances…

CHESAPEAKE RIPPER ALLEGEDLY SERVED HUMAN FLESH AT DINNER PARTIES … Maryland State Police say psychiatrist suspected of committing thirty-eight murders may have been serving his victims to unsuspecting dinner guests … “We’re seeing evidence that suggests Lecter incorporated tissue and organs from his victims into his cooking” … Virtually all of Lecter’s kitchen appliances have tested positive for human proteins, including a heavy-duty meat slicer, a sausage maker, an airtight barrel for

fermenting beer, and, puzzlingly, a centrifugal juicer, in addition to confiscated food items including steaks, cutlets, ground meat, and "foie gras that didn't come from a duck, let's leave it at that" … "It looks likely there would have been more food than just one person could have eaten by himself…"

INSIDE HANNIBAL THE CANNIBAL'S MEAT FREEZER … The room so gruesome four FBI agents sickened upon entering … meat hooks … bone saws … cleavers of all sizes … cured human thighs … a drawer full of severed tongues … flesh carefully shaved off the face of a dead teenage girl … "You walk into this room and you're assaulted by the complete disregard for human life on display in here," says a local police officer who asked not to be named. "It's just horrible … the smell … I still see the damn thing whenever I close my eyes…"

LECTER RECUPERATING AFTER BEING "NEARLY DISEMBOWELED" BY FBI PROFILER … EMTs: "When we found him, his guts were spilling out" … an eight-inch linoleum knife with a high carbon steel blade (see photo) believed to belong to Graham … the profiler confronted Lecter during an FBI-sanctioned operation … Graham had been released from a psychiatric institution only hours before … FBI Director Alphonse Petersen in his statement this evening stressed that Lecter was the only injury in the tense standoff … "Mr. Graham is under no suspicion at this time. We believe his actions were in self-defense…"

FINALLY EXPOSED: RESPECTED BALTIMORE PSYCHIATRIST HANNIBAL LECTER IS THE CHESAPEAKE RIPPER ... Lecter on the run, now suspected of having committed at least twenty murders … Framed FBI profiler Will Graham knew the truth … Months of accusations led to noted Georgetown psychiatrist Alana Bloom investigating Lecter herself … brutally slain in Lecter's kitchen early this morning… Graham is believed to have tipped off authorities despite having been locked inside a high-security cell at the time…

Hannibal enjoys reading his press, although he is galled by how much of the rumormongering is nothing but blind grabbing at straws. But this is nothing unexpected, and even the unfounded accusations are more amusing than insulting. He scrolls through the articles in reverse chronology, fascinated by the way the facts of the case fly apart, the details creeping out of focus the further back he goes. The earliest reports get almost everything wrong, claiming Alana died in a "lovers' quarrel." Freddie Lounds even implies in her very first write-up that Alana might have been his accomplice, a lurid insinuation that makes Hannibal's lips quirk downwards. Miss Lounds, naughty indeed.

But he is surprised—and even disappointed—to see that Freddie's report of her visit to his hospital room is almost completely purged of detail, lurid or otherwise:

TC.COM EXCLUSIVE! FIRST PHOTOS OF HANNIBAL THE CANNIBAL'S HOSPITAL ROOM: DOCTORS SAY LECTER TO MAKE A FULL RECOVERY

The rest of the page is devoted to the photographs: a full-body shot of him lying in bed with his sunken eyes shut, his wound (with a black bar slapped over his groin, how considerate of Freddie), and the shot he requested of his face. The captions are all bare-boned, hardly informative. Freddie has made no mention of their conversation, only describing him as awake and "semi-aware."

Strange. She isn't usually one for restraint.

Hannibal stares into the screen, considering the options, unaware of his finger tapping insistently against the mouse. The guard sitting in the corner of the little concrete chamber watches that finger warily.

Hannibal makes up his mind and scrolls down to the bottom of the page. He leaves a comment:

> Your photographs demonstrate a keen eye, but the accompanying text leaves something to be desired. Your story wants fleshing out, Miss Lounds. Perhaps there's something we can do about that.

He signs it: *Modest P*

He assumes he will receive a visit in a day or two, but Freddie exceeds his expectations. Within three hours of leaving her this message, Hannibal hears the purposeful rap of her stiletto boots on the subbasement floor. Stopping in the middle of a chest lift, he refastens the top of his jumpsuit—unbuttoned to control his perspiration during his exercise routine—and gets to his feet, ready to greet her.

Gornergrat walks alongside Freddie, explaining the rules in a loud, lecturing voice.

"—and most importantly, under no circumstances should you touch him. If you have to pass him anything, we insist on soft paper, only soft paper, and take out the staples before you hand it to him through this thing here, that's his food tray."

"This isn't my first rodeo," says Freddie. She is wearing a red-and-black leopard print ensemble and matching sunglasses despite being several stories underground.

Gornergrat looks a little punctured by her lack of appreciation. When he performs a good deed for a woman, he expects her to prostrate herself with gratitude. "Let's get you a chair," he grunts.

"I'll stand." And when the orderly hangs around, looking at Freddie expectantly, she adds: "Thanks. I'm all set here."

“Be nice to the lady,” Gornergrat says, pointing sharply at Hannibal, before striding off as if he has very important things to do elsewhere.

Freddie removes her sunglasses. Her pupils contract as she examines Hannibal, quickly taking in his crisp jumpsuit, his improved color, his shaven chin, and the bite mark faded into two purple lines on his cheek. Her eyes linger on his hair, clean but overgrown and tucked behind his ears. Still eons removed from his former self. But he’s getting there.

“You put me on your visitors list,” she says.

“I did.”

“Nice of you.” Freddie walks beyond his range of vision, retrieving a folding chair from the storage closet herself. “Saved me the trouble of calling in a favor from the administrator.”

“There is no denying he owes you one.” Hannibal politely resumes his chair now that his guest is seated. “You pumped air into Frederick’s lungs for—twenty minutes, wasn’t it? How did it feel to have someone’s life in your hands?”

“Yeah,” calls Abel Gideon from five cells down, “how *did* it feel?”

Freddie doesn’t even blink. She calls over her shoulder, “Dr. Gideon, if you want to offer me an exclusive interview, you’ll have to wait your turn.”

Gideon smirks at her, but holds his tongue.

When Freddie looks back at Hannibal, the smile on her face is that of one player acknowledging another. “I didn’t come here to talk about *me*, Dr. Lecter.”

“A pity,” he replies. “It’s you I want to talk about.”

She raises her eyebrows questioningly.

His manner is a little too curious to appear altogether polite. “Why didn’t you include any of our conversation in your exclusive report? I never told you we were off the record.”

“What makes you think there was anything in our conversation worth reporting?” She tosses her head, letting her hair bob out her unconcern. “As I remember it, all we really talked about was how much you disliked your *nom de guerre*. Not a lot of news value in that.”

Hannibal watches Freddie closely. He is surprised by his own feelings: how delighted he feels to see her, to have this renewed opportunity to hone himself against such an unyielding whetstone.

But he conceals his pleasure. Instead tilts his head to chide her. “As opposed to your recent coverage, which has been nothing but scattered hearsay and ephemera. I imagine anything I say to you, no matter how trivial, would have some value. Tell me, how much additional traffic did those exclusive photographs generate for your website?”

She draws in a slow breath. “Ninety-thousand hits in two hours, an eleven-hundred percent increase in unique visitors over that three-day period.”

Hannibal nods his appreciation for these high figures and the ease with which she recalls them. “You would have had more if you had published our conversation.”

“You got me,” Freddie admits, with a tough smile. “Truth is, I’m biding my time. We’re still months away from your trial. I don’t want to blow my load too soon.”

“Anticipating a book deal?” Hannibal guesses, with some astuteness it seems, because she looks unnerved—but she recovers quickly.

“*An Interview with a Cannibal.* Has a ring to it, doesn’t it?”

“Derivative again. We can do better.”

Her eyes can’t help but widen. “*We*?”

“I’d like to keep talking to you. Regularly, if possible.”

Freddie’s face doesn’t change, but she can’t conceal the smell of excitement wafting off her person. “Exclusive access?”

“Naturally.”

“A generous offer. What’s in it for you?”

Hannibal smiles at the sharpness of this question. “As I’ve said, I consider us to be in the same business. Our partnership would be mutually beneficial.”

“And I can ask you anything?”

“You’re welcome to ask me whatever questions you’d like. But I may not always answer. I confess I am not overly fond of talking about myself.”

He looks down into his lap bashfully, although he is still very much aware of Freddie’s mercenary stare burning a hole through the top of his head.

“Then it’s hardly an all-access pass,” she says.

“It is better access than that granted to CNN, the New York Times, and the Huffington Post. Make the most of it, Miss Lounds.”

“And you don’t want anything from me in return?”

“What could I possibly want?” Hannibal asks, all innocence.

“How about information?”

Suddenly Freddie’s expression is very bright, almost teasing. Dangling before his hungry eyes a dripping chunk of meat.

“Share and share alike,” she adds.

Quid pro quo, Hannibal thinks. Cautiously he gives her the faintest of smiles. “And what information could you share with me?”

“I have a story for you. About Will Graham.”

The name hangs in the air like a plume of smoke.

“I’m listening,” Hannibal says, without inflection.

“What if I were to tell you”—and Freddie leans forward—“*that I know where he is*.”

Hannibal says nothing, emotes nothing. But this stonewall is a marked change from his earlier affability, and Freddie registers it. Knows she has caught a scent.

Before continuing her story, she takes out her digital recorder, and with the smallest incline of his head Hannibal gives her permission to begin recording him. Freddie wraps her gloved fingers around the recorder as if gripping a lifeline, and begins:

“Will Graham disappeared three weeks after you were captured, and I don’t just mean he skipped town. He ditched his cell phone, went completely off the grid. Nobody knew where he was. As you can imagine, Jack Crawford blew a gasket when he heard about it. Turns out our friend Will wasn’t doing so hot after your little adventure together, did you know that?” She doesn’t wait for an answer. “Jack was worried he had reached critical mass. He put out an APB on Will. Was just about ready to start dragging the Potomac when Will resurfaced—not literally—in Jacksonville, Florida. Alive and reasonably coherent by all accounts. State police spotted his car at a gas station; apparently it was hard to miss with a mangy dog sticking out of every window. Troopers escorted him back to the sheriff’s office for a friendly phone call with Jack. I’m told people’s ears were ringing all the way down the hall at Quantico.”

Silence, except for the creak of leather as Freddie shifts in her seat, waiting for Hannibal to react.

When he finally speaks, his voice is hushed, colorless. “Exactly when was this?”

“First week of November. You were still in a coma.”

“Then it’s old news,” he says, lids like pulled-down shades obscuring the lights of his eyes. “Will Graham could be anywhere by now.”

“He could,” Freddie agrees. “But I thought you’d appreciate all the intelligence on him you can get.”

“Why would you think that?”

“Oh, don’t be coy with me, Dr. Lecter. I have a nose for this sort of thing.”

“And what is it exactly that you smell, Miss Lounds?”

The stare he levels at her is the blank, cold challenge of an apex predator, half asleep until a moment ago, now considering the merit of getting off its gore-matted haunches for a chase. She returns this stare in kind—not a reflection, but Freddie's own particular brand of animal ferocity.

She asks: "What is the nature of your relationship with Will Graham?"

Hannibal glances at the digital recorder before replying, "I'm his friend."

"You're his friend." This last word repeated with quotation marks a mile high. "Present tense?"

"Yes."

"He gutted you with a linoleum knife."

"Yes."

"Not exactly a friendly gesture."

"I still consider myself his friend. You will have to ask him whether he considers himself mine."

"Oh, believe me," Freddie says, "I would if I could. Jack Crawford has thrown up some very high walls around Will; he may as well be lying at the bottom of the Potomac for all the access I've got." Her bright bird's eyes take on an extra gleam. "Why is he so intent on disappearing?"

"Will has his reasons. Any answer I give you would be mere speculation on my part."

From behind Hannibal's polite mask he radiates discomfort, but it only makes Freddie smile as she proceeds to a line of questioning even more uncomfortable.

"There *is* an answer you can give me. One I'd find very enlightening. You see, the only thing about your capture that really doesn't make any sense to me is why you were in Will Graham's house to begin with."

He dips his chin, stares at her unblinkingly. The hallway seems suddenly to hum.

"You could have run," Freddie prods him. "You had a good head start on law enforcement, and you are obviously very resourceful. You could have been on a plane to Argentina before you even made the No Fly List. But instead of fleeing the country you drive to Virginia, and spend all day waiting for Will Graham to come home from the hospital. Why?"

A live wire of silence as she stares at him expectantly.

If she wants a truth, his truth, then he'll give her one she won't soon forget. In a voice barely above a whisper, he says:

“You could ask me anything, Miss Lounds. You could ask me why I threw those dinner parties. You could ask me how it felt to hold in my hands the still-beating heart of that poor alderman for the City of Annapolis. You could ask me why I cooked and ate the kidneys of that upstanding young Princeton student. Sautéed kidneys in white wine is a specialty of mine, you know, or at least you *would* know if you cared to ask me about my cooking. Or perhaps you would rather ask why I sliced Abigail Hobbs’s throat in her own kitchen, why I let those black pulses of arterial spray anoint the walls of her childhood home, the very same place where I once saved her life. Would you like to ask me about that?”

Freddie can say nothing in response. She appears to be holding her breath.

He can taste her fear, the metallic tang maddening on his tongue. Hannibal’s heart beats steadily, but his skin prickles in a most exhilarating way, as if suddenly too tight to hem him in. He so rarely speaks like this, in words calibrated to shock and appall. The supreme rush of it. To transform himself into the horror she has only written about, never seen.

“But instead of asking me any of these questions,” he continues, “you insist on interrogating me about what I was doing in *Will Graham’s house*.”

And Freddie, brave clever Freddie—far too reckless Freddie—sees his grandstanding for what it is. She pulls herself together, squares her shoulders, and says: “Yes. I do insist. Why were you there?”

The barest hint of a growl in his voice. “To kill him, obviously.”

“No,” she says.

He raises his eyebrows. “Why do you say that?”

“If you had gone there to kill him, he’d be dead.”

Hannibal lets her see that this impresses him, but when he speaks, a warning remains in his voice. “Then tell me, Miss Lounds—why was I there?”

Her voice is shaking just a little. “It could be for any number of reasons.”

“The most likely being?”

“I think you went there because you expected something from Will Graham. Maybe you thought he’d cooperate with you, that he would help hide you from the federal marshals.”

“You are suggesting Will was my accomplice?”

“I think it’s a strong possibility, yes. If he ratted you out, it would explain why he left town in such a hurry and why Jack Crawford is now so intent on protecting him.”

“Yes,” says Hannibal, without affect, “it *would* explain some things, wouldn’t it.”

“You were responsible for Will’s imprisonment. You murdered his friend Dr. Bloom.” Freddie’s brow furrows. “After all that, why did you think Will would help you?”

“I never said I did.”

She tuts at him. “You went to that house, Dr. Lecter. Made yourself vulnerable. You trusted Will Graham. And in return he gutted you with a linoleum knife.”

Freddie is steeling herself in case these words provoke him again. But Hannibal simply sits there, a soft smile on his face.

“Why do you believe I did it?” he asks her.

“You can’t just keep turning every question around on me—”

“I am not dodging your question, I am simply interested in what you believe. You obviously believe *something*, otherwise you wouldn’t be pushing me in this direction. Humor me, Miss Lounds. Why was I inside that house?”

“I believe...” She blinks quickly, fingers twitching around the recorder. “I believe…”

“*Yes*?”

“I believe people do crazy things,” Freddie says, “when they’re in love.”

Hannibal’s mouth shuts with a snap.

And Freddie stops the recorder. “Well,” she says, voice thin with both relief and the aftershocks of panic, “that certainly has some news value. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” says Hannibal. All politeness again, though a cold frisson lingers in the air.

Freddie gets to her feet. It takes her a beat longer than it should—her legs are trembling.

“Please make sure you publish this story without attribution,” Hannibal tells her, “or I will be forced to remove you from my visitors list.”

After a moment of deliberation, she nods. “I don’t need to include direct quotes anyway. You barely said anything.”

Hannibal nods minutely. “I left that to you.”

She looks satisfied. But a moment later—

“Wait a minute.”

Now she stares at him. His folded hands, his easy manner, so completely different from the dead-eyed threat he appeared to be a minute ago. Most interview subjects at the end of a session with Freddie Lounds are sweating buckets, fidgeting messes all wrung out of useful information. But Hannibal is dry and careful and intent.

She puts it together. Lifts up the tape recorder. “You *want* me to publish this story, don’t you? You’re completely fine with this.”

And he *smiles*.

Her eyebrows skyrocket. “You realize if I publish this, Jack Crawford’s head is gonna explode?”

“I look forward to it,” says Hannibal, cheerfully.

Oh how she stares. She has never been played like this before. She thought she had pried off his mask and glimpsed the real monster—she thought she’d even seen *past* the monster to the damaged little waif crouching behind its bulk. But the only thing she has seen is another mask.

“Any other stories you’d like me to publish?” she asks, tartly, but she can’t conceal her awe.

“Yes, but they can wait.” Now Hannibal smiles with all his teeth. “Wouldn’t want to *blow your load*.”

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Even Hannibal can't always get what he wants.

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry for the delay, everyone. I don't have a good excuse: these last two months have just been a series of distractions, big and little, plus the difficulties of wrangling this mad beast of a fanfic into a coherent and meaningful form. But it's wrangled now, so as an apology please accept this long, hopefully madly juicy chapter. It contains a few things that aren't standard to this ficverse: a scene of very graphic violence and some homophobic slurs. Fair to say, we're heading into some strange territory here, so buckle up.

I wrote a prequel to this chapter. You can read it here. It provides a little context for the events that follow, plus it will remind you of some plot points you might have forgotten during the long wait.

Mea culpa, guys. Thanks for sticking with this.

Five days lie between Hannibal and his weekly Internet access, so he is prevented from reading Freddie's article himself. But evidence of its existence reaches him in the form of Dr. Chilton. He holds Hannibal's next therapy session in the Coffee Room, where an electroencephalography technician attaches electrodes to his scalp. Hannibal compliments the technician on her choice of hand and nail cream as Chilton lowers the lights.

A series of images projected onto the wall-mounted screen. First come the innocuous. An eggplant. A tropical beach. A pair of leather Oxfords. Baby dolls. Then—with an ostentatious click of the remote—Chilton proceeds onwards to crime scene photographs, autopsies, battlefield aftermath, the wreckage from an airplane crash. As the technician observes the EEG readings on her monitor, Hannibal looks at each of the photographs with his head canted

right, an expression of detached and quizzical interest on his face. The expression of someone viewing a theatrical performance not entirely to his taste but curious enough to keep him in his seat. He has a suspicion as to the content of Chilton's next act.

Lo and behold, the airplane wreck gives way to a slathering of still images pulled from a skin flick. Two well-muscled men in a shower stall, both standing as one manually stimulates the other, then one on his knees making liberal use of his tongue, then both on their knees at the bottom of the stall as water pounds their naked backs.

Dr. Chilton angles his own chair so he won't have to see the screen. He asks:

"What do you think of these pictures, Hannibal?"

"That tile grout needs replacing," he observes.

"You don't find these images exciting?"

"No more so than the plane wreck." Let Chilton parse that one however he likes.

The truth is that Hannibal is indifferent towards pornography. He finds it to be awkwardly staged and joylessly photographed, the kind of crass titillation that only a boor like Chilton would find thrilling. Hannibal wonders why the hospital director hasn't thought to attach a blood-pressure cuff to his penis. Maybe Chilton is working up to that.

But the next picture Dr. Chilton shows him is of Will Graham. A DMV photo, or maybe something off an old employee badge, taken before Will met Hannibal. Will's hair is shorter and he looks healthier, his face fuller and eyes clearer, though the tightness of his unsmiling mouth betrays him. He is staring intently just to the left of the camera lens.

Hannibal knows what Chilton expects of him: outrage at having the object of his fixation projected adjacent to the sexual images. But when Hannibal feels inside himself for anger, he finds none. His internal landscape is empty except for a slow gnaw of something like hunger. This photograph is a record of what Will looked like before Hannibal entered his life. This might be what Will looks like now.

The technician squints at her monitor. How does loneliness manifest on an EEG? What spikes and dips delineate the contours of that old pain?

All the while Chilton rakes the side of Hannibal's face with his seamy eyes. But Hannibal keeps his eyes on Will's, even though Will's eyes, unfocused as they are, cannot stare back.

When Hannibal speaks, his voice is as even and polite as can be. "You appear to be insinuating something, Doctor."

"And what am I insinuating?" Chilton asks, insinuatingly.

"That my concern for Will Graham went beyond that of a psychiatrist for his patient."

Chilton leans forward. "You and I both know it did."

“Will is my friend.”

This statement lingers so long Chilton might as well be marinating in it. “And how do you define friendship?” he finally asks. “What does that word mean to you?”

“Will and I share a perspective.” Hannibal’s eyes have yet to leave the screen. “We were born in different places; grew up under different influences; we possess differing values, sentiments and prejudices; and yet we are just alike.”

Chilton takes this in slowly and with great effort. “You certainly have things in common. He profiles serial killers. You are one.”

This observation doesn’t merit a response from Hannibal. His eyes stay rooted to the screen as he tries to meet those dead eyes, those eyes that won’t stare back.

“And you have this hospital in common,” Chilton continues. “You have *me* in common. Only months ago Will Graham sat just where you are sitting now. I’m sure you’re aware of that fact.”

“I am.”

The screen still commands Hannibal’s attention; he is under its trance. A trance Chilton is determined to break. He stands up, so that the projection of Will now wraps across his face and body.

“Did you enjoy visiting Will when he was confined inside this hospital?”

‘Enjoy’ is an inadequate word for describing what Hannibal felt during those precious months.

“I relished the opportunity it gave me.”

“Oh, I’m sure you *relished* it.” Chilton looks delighted. “Having Will locked up in a cage, a pet for you to visit whenever you liked. The only person who knew your true identity, and no one would listen to him. He was a pariah of your own making. How exciting it must have been, watching him buckle under all that pressure.”

“Will’s suffering fascinated me,” Hannibal admits. He is staring at the place above Chilton’s head where Will’s eyes are projected. “But the pleasure I received from his suffering paled in comparison to what I felt in those moments when he fought back.”

“And what did you feel in those moments?”

Even Hannibal is in suspense of what he will say next. “I felt… *seen*.”

“You felt understood,” says Chilton, nodding. “You wanted Will to understand you.”

“Yes,” says Hannibal, eyes on Will.

“You wanted him to know you… *completely*.”

“Yes.”

Chilton’s next question lands with all the grace of a sledgehammer blow.

“Do you desire Will sexually?”

Now Hannibal breaks his staring contest with Will’s image. His dark eyes are like two talons latching into Chilton’s vulnerable flesh.

“Well, Doctor,” he says, matter-of-factly, “on more than one occasion I *have* thought about eating him.”

This remark renders Chilton speechless, as intended. Hannibal grabs his moment.

“I didn’t think you were a reader of TattleCrime.”

Chilton twitches. “I’m not,” he says, fussily straightening his tie. “I think it’s a rag, poorly researched and unforgivably sensationalized. But a certain article was brought to my attention, and I must admit, I found it…revealing.”

Hannibal ignores the salaciousness in Chilton’s tone. “I haven’t read it myself.”

“But you don’t have to. Freddie Lounds visited you the day before yesterday. You were her primary source for that little exposé.”

Hannibal neither confirms nor denies this. Which makes Chilton even pricklier. He stalks over to the projector and switches it off. A negative image of Will’s photograph lingers in Hannibal’s vision for a moment before dissipating.

“Outside, please,” Chilton snips at the EEG technician, who is reluctant to leave her post. “*Now*.”

When the door closes behind her, Chilton turns back on Hannibal. At this moment Chilton is so annoyed with his wayward patient that he has forgotten to fear him. He draws himself up tall as he declares:

“An unwise choice of confidante, Freddie Lounds. I expected better from you.”

“What did you expect?” Hannibal asks, even though he knows what’s coming.

“I expected you to talk to *me*! I’m supposed to be your psychiatrist here, Hannibal. If you are to unburden yourself on anyone, it should be me.”

Though Hannibal has thirty electrode-laden wires trailing off his head, it is Chilton—bug-eyed and gasping—who looks truly ridiculous. But Hannibal suppresses his amusement, blinks back at Chilton placidly.

“I have answered every question you’ve asked me, Dr. Chilton.”

“You haven’t told me anything I didn’t already know.”

“You are an experienced psychiatrist. Is it so surprising that your pre-diagnosis of me should prove accurate?”

“Pssh! You can’t flatter your way out of this! The only insight I’ve had into your mental state I read on TattleCrime.com. This is unacceptable. I thought we had an agreement.”

As Chilton grows more animated, Hannibal grows less. He doesn’t even bother with blinking now. “We do.”

“Then you’d better stop playing these games. Because those little creature comforts you enjoy so much? All I have to do is this”—and Chilton snaps his fingers in front of Hannibal’s nose—“and it’s like they were never there. I’ll have the orderlies remove your toilet seat while I’m at it. Then we’ll see how entertaining you find your stay here.”

Hannibal’s head is lowered; he isn’t meeting Chilton’s eyes. The very image of the chided schoolboy. On the monitor, the EEG levels jump and judder. But Dr. Chilton doesn’t notice this.

Hannibal has gone away. For just a moment he visits the palace. Stands in the aqueous hush of the main gallery, eyes roaming over his own work, observing the stately profile of the Girl on the Stag as she drips blood into the center of her fountain.

In the outer world Dr. Chilton has reached his stride. “The next time we meet, the subject of our discussion will be your latent homosexual tendencies and their manifestation during your ‘friendship’ with Will Graham. And I’m expecting you to provide me with information that isn’t already plastered all over the Internet. Do you understand me?” And then, when Hannibal doesn’t immediately respond, “Do you understand me, Hannibal?”

His eyes go from dull to sharp so quickly that Chilton takes an instinctual step back.

“I understand you perfectly,” Hannibal says.

He lies on his cot, eyes shut, taking great huffs of breath through his nose. The walk to and from the Coffee Room has exhausted him. Now his wound aches in long slow pulses, as if a sucking void has opened up just beneath the damaged tissue. In the muffled distance an inmate wails and wails, ragged ululations never-ending. In Hannibal’s cell, the toilet tank drip drip drips.

He reaches up, passes his palms across the top of his head, moving from his hairline all the way to the base of his skull. His fingers stutter over the patches of sticky residue left behind by the electrodes; the conductive paste has an astringent smell. Disgusting.

He is surprised by his reaction to the session with Dr. Chilton. He is very irritated. His irritation stems from neither the indignity of Chilton’s insinuations nor his threats. What irritates Hannibal is his own underestimation of Chilton. He thought he could dole out overcooked morsels to the hospital director for a few more months, keep the man salivating.

But Chilton wants more from him. Chilton wants the pièce de résistance. Hannibal should have expected it. Now he has no choice but to comply. Being without choices is very irritating. Hannibal doesn't like it.

Against the velvet backing of his eyelids he sees Will's photograph, a faded projection of the unrecoverable past, and his wound pulses more insistently. Hannibal can't stop his lips from molding into a grimace. Will feels so very far away from him right now. Out of reach. Hannibal needs to be closer. To be gutted and to gut. But before he can plunge beneath the surface of his mind, Dr. Gideon calls out to him.

"Sooooo, Dr. Lecter. Finally I understand why you're such a quiet scrawny thing. You are *pining*, aren't you?"

It seems that Dr. Gideon has read the TattleCrime article. He sits on the padded floor of his cell, curled up against the glass, arms wrapped tightly around his knees. His grin borders on feral.

"Now that's a surprising turn of events," he says. "The Chesapeake Ripper. Pining away for poor Will Graham. Personally I don't understand the fuss. He's badly groomed and perpetually sweaty. Or is that the kind of thing that really—ah—lights your fire?"

Hannibal says nothing. He remains lying on his cot, taking deep slow breaths.

"Well, I feel for you," Gideon continues. "It's a real humdinger of a tragedy. Because you, especially you, must be smart enough to realize you are just not Will Graham's type. The only thing that isn't straight about Will Graham is his shooting."

"What's this, now?"

Gideon's words have roused Louie, Hannibal's cell neighbor. He heaves himself into a sitting position on his cot, squints his eyes, trying to get a clearer look at Hannibal. "Abel, are you saying this guy's a fag?"

"That wouldn't be my choice of words, Louie," says Gideon, cringing.

"Why's that a surprise?" Louie is still examining Hannibal. "Guy's got fag written all over him."

"Now why do you say that?" Hannibal asks, without opening his eyes.

"All the art you got in there. Fags love art."

"Unassailable logic," sighs Gideon.

But Louie is not deterred. "I killed a fag once."

"Oh?" says Hannibal, with pronounced disinterest. "Had the man in question done something to offend you, or were his sexual preferences offense enough?"

A long pause from Louie. Then, in a low resonating voice, he says: “He had a demon inside him.”

Now Hannibal opens his eyes. He doesn’t bother sitting up, simply turns his head on his mattress so he can better look at Louie. The man has the voice of a Brooklyn plumber and the body to match, powerful long-fingered hands and a round gut underneath his ratty t-shirt. The scarred lid of his left eye is drooping heavily, giving him a look of sleepy fiendishness, like a bear on the cusp of hibernation.

Hannibal hasn’t given Louie much thought up until now. He notices the Bible on the man’s desk, the crucifix made of folded newspapers taped to Louie’s wall.

“I see,” Hannibal says. “So it was the demon who urged him to have sex with men?”

Louie snorts dismissively. “Nah. Sex with men, that’s human behavior. Natural behavior. Maybe not in your case, but generally speaking.”

Hannibal gracefully lets this go. “Then how, pray tell, did you detect the existence of the demon?”

As Louie speaks, a grave sincerity begins pulsing in his voice.

“Well, first I heard it laughing. Its laughs would come out of Denny’s mouth—Denny’s the man I killed. They were long sharp laughs, like knives. I heard those laughs and I said to myself, ‘Something’s not right,’ so I went looking for the demon. And I found it in here.” Louie opens his own mouth, points past his tongue. “Right down here in Denny’s throat is where it hid. Whenever he opened his mouth, I could see the little lights of its eyes.”

Hannibal carefully sits up on his cot, one hand still pressed to his aching midsection. He sniffs the air.

“Mr. Costa,” he says, after a moment. “May I ask you something?”

Louie’s eyelid droops further. “Guess so.”

Hannibal tilts his head. “Do I have a demon inside me?”

Five cells down, Dr. Gideon snorts.

Meanwhile Louie stares at Hannibal as he scratches hard at his elbow, clearly trying to work out whether he is being mocked. Hannibal blinks back at him, blank-faced.

Finally Louie decides to trust him. “You gotta open your mouth.”

Hannibal stands, steps to the glass, and opens up. Louie approaches the glass of his own cell. Gideon watches them avidly.

Again Hannibal sniffs the air: Louie’s sweat has an acrid, goatish smell. Schizophrenia.

Louie peers into the black maw between Hannibal’s lips.

“Nah. No demon. It’s just you in there.”

Hannibal shuts his mouth. “What a relief.”

Hannibal eats dinner. Pasta primavera, in theory; in practice it is overcooked penne with thawed peas, crumbling broccoli, and tomatoes that taste of stomach acid. Perhaps the name pasta inverno would be more apt.

The telltale clatter of the outer gate unlocking. Hannibal puts down his fork, even though a drooping tube of pasta is still speared on the tines. He slides his dinner tray until it is flush with the corner of his desk. He’ll finish it later. The dish can hardly taste worse when cold.

The low rumble of voices conferring at the end of the hallway. Hannibal has a visitor.

He has been expecting this. For Dr. Chilton isn’t the only person riled up by the TattleCrime article. Hannibal had a different target in mind, and it seems that target has finally taken the bait.

He sits down on the edge of his cot. His nostrils dilate.

A familiar smell—and not the one he was expecting. Magnolia and honeysuckle, with the sting of citrus underneath. Distinctive.

Hannibal makes a quick decision: he lies flat on the cot and closes his eyes.

The visitor approaches his cell. Slow businesslike footsteps, then silence.

Hannibal doesn’t move, doesn’t speak. He allows her to look her fill. Lets her take in his dingy cell, his noisy toilet, his sad little vegetarian dinner. He allows her to register his altered appearance: his emaciated body underneath the prison jumpsuit, the purple bite mark on his waxen cheek, his overgrown hair. What a shock it must be, seeing *him* inside this hospital. *Him* on the other side of the glass partition. How strange. And yet not strange at all. Uncomfortably familiar.

“Agent Katz,” he says, with his eyes closed. “Still favoring the Burberry.”

An indrawn breath. Then Beverly says, “Dr. Lecter. Is this a bad time?”

The way she says this indicates she doesn’t care if it is. And yet she still stands there waiting for his answer, a facsimile of politeness. Playing with him as nicely as she can—on Uncle Jack’s orders, no doubt.

“A bad time?” Hannibal repeats. “No time is bad for me in here.”

Now he opens his eyes. Sits up on the cot, folds his hands on his knees, and examines her with his head subtly tilted.

Beverly looks well. Easy and at home. She has pulled the lapels of her leather jacket all the way up to her jaw, the only indication of her discomfort.

“To what do I owe the pleasure?” he asks.

She opens her mouth. Closes it. Opens it again. “I was hoping I could get your help with something. It’s a hard case, and we need an expert opinion.”

The words sound scripted. How amusing. Hannibal imagines Jack and Beverly poring over some outdated psychological profile, trying to figure out the best angle of approach. Apparently they have decided on professionalism and flattery. Hannibal can’t entirely blame them for this miscalculation; after all, they are without the aid of their chief navigator.

He lets his eyes sparkle, perfectly matches her tone of affected courtesy. “I am always happy to assist the FBI in any way I can.”

Beverly looks wary, but she still pulls from her messenger bag a buff folder stamped: ‘BAU —Confidential.’

“Three men in Massachusetts, all found dead in the last three weeks. Each of the victims was hanged with a noose fashioned from his own rooftop Christmas lights.”

“How very interesting.”

“I have the police reports here. And pictures.”

She puts the folder into his food tray, but he makes no move to pull it through. He sits on his bed, still as a statue, eyes completely shadowed as he watches her.

“If I am not mistaken,” he says, “you have your own people who can do this.”

Beverly shifts her weight, takes a calming breath. “We do. They’re on it as we speak. But we’d still appreciate it if you could take a look.”

He notes her tactful, if impersonal, use of “we.” Beverly speaks to him as if he is still her valued colleague. But he can smell in the air between them the sour note of her concealed hostility.

The feeling is decidedly mutual.

So he asks: “…*Why should I*?”

The words hum, brusque and biting. Beverly has never heard this tone from him before. Her eyebrows draw together.

“Why should you assist the FBI with our investigation?”

“That is what I’m asking, yes.”

“It’s not a question you ever asked when we came to you before.”

Hannibal's eyes gleam brighter. "Agent Katz, I am neither delusional nor an amnesiac; and I assume the same can be said for you. We both know things have changed since the last time the FBI approached me."

His words do the trick. Beverly drops some—but not quite all—of her counterfeit politeness. She crosses her arms, posture caught halfway between defensive and aggressive. "Ok," she says. "I'm just gonna lay it out for you, then. You help us with this case, and Jack will see it as a show of good faith."

"A show of good faith," Hannibal echoes, colorlessly.

"You'll be demonstrating your willingness to cooperate with the FBI, just like you've been cooperating with the hospital staff here on your therapy. The judge will take it into account when your case goes to trial."

"A gracious offer. Tell me, why hasn't Jack come to make it himself?"

She gestures significantly at the case file still lying in his food tray. "Jack's kinda busy at the moment."

Hannibal inclines his head. "Of course. I can't imagine how *woefully* understaffed you must be."

A muscle twitches in Beverly's jaw. "Are you going to help us or not?"

He says nothing. Merely examines her for a good long while.

Beverly Katz. Will Graham's *hero*.

There is no denying Beverly is a first-rate FBI agent. She is competent as a scientist and confident in the field. Perceptive, perseverant, and, above all, loyal. Hannibal respects her for the many professional and personal risks she took for Will's sake, for believing in him when no one else would and for operating as his proxy outside the Baltimore State Hospital. At times Beverly's involvement in their game made her a nuisance to him, but that is testament to her remarkable efficacy as Will's little helper.

But despite all these factors in Beverly's favor, the fact remains: Hannibal dislikes her. He finds Beverly sorely lacking in imagination, a personal failing he could excuse if not for her coarseness. Some might call it toughness, strength of character, but Hannibal believes this rough quality of Beverly's to be an affectation, one common to women employed in male-dominated workplaces. Beverly has affected this blunt demeanor—jokily sarcastic, casually callous—so that she might seem as untouched by the horrors of her profession as her male cohort. This chumminess Hannibal finds grating and dishonest.

But it never truly bothered him until he saw the way it affected Will. Beverly's manner was so strong it tended to rub off on Will; in her presence he became as chummy as she, just as crude—*folksy*. Often Hannibal would arrive for a session with Will and instantly know that Beverly had been visiting him, because he could still hear her in Will's voice, a brazen echo. In those moments, Hannibal had hated Beverly.

If given the chance, he would have processed her into something rustic. Perhaps a pie.

Now here she stands before him, brazen as ever, once again playing proxy.

Hannibal considers his options, makes his decision. He no longer has any incentive to get along nicely with Beverly Katz.

He rises from the bed with feline swiftness. For this dexterous display he pays with pain, but none of it shows in his expression as he steps to the middle of the cell, confronting Beverly head on. She looks unnerved, but holds her ground.

"Aren't you just a paragon of bravery?" he almost coos. "Coming here, facing me. Safe to say I must be the last person on earth you want to see."

"Safe to say," she echoes, tightly.

He stares at her unblinkingly through the glass. "Then why come?"

"I already told you. We'd like your help."

"The *FBI* would like my help. But what about you?"

She swallows. "Are you going to look at that file, Dr. Lecter? Or should I take it back?"

He talks over her. "I know why you're here, of course. Jack Crawford sent you. And where Jack sends you, you go. That's some loyalty you have there, Agent Katz, but be warned: loyalty begins to look like rank stupidity when the beneficiary of your loyalty so shamelessly exploits you."

She is not amused. Through her clenched jaw she says: "So I'm guessing that's a 'no' to helping us."

Hannibal's upper lip wants to curl, so he lets it, giving Beverly a cold glimpse of his pointed teeth. It is not a polite gesture, but then again, nothing about this meeting is polite.

"You think you can throw me a bone and I'll be grateful? Pass me me a few photos of this two-bit strangler's work and expect me to kiss Jack Crawford's ring again?"

"You want more?" Fear cracks Beverly's professional façade, and through the cracks her anger seeps, darkening her voice. "Jack will get you more. We can contact you the next time we have a case worthier of your attention, if that's what you want. And we can do what we can to improve your quality of life around here. Fast track your requests, get you access to restricted materials. You name what you want, we'll help you get it."

Now Hannibal prowls right up to the glass—and Beverly can't help it: she steps back.

"Jack knows what I want," he hisses. "He won't give it to me."

Beverly's façade has given way completely. She glares at him. "The whole country knows what you want. You made sure of that, didn't you."

Now he smiles at her, widely, until his eyes crinkle. Finally: honesty from Beverly.

“You’ve read the article,” he says.

“No shit.”

Her voice is hoarse with rage. Wrought silence as they stare at each other through the glass.

“Well?” he prods. “What did you think of it?”

“What did I *think* of it? I think that not only are you a psychopathic murderer, you’re also an asshole.”

His eyes slowly narrow, signaling to her that he is unimpressed by the profanity, but she blunders on.

“I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but you’re on the other side of the bars now. You’re gonna be locked up in a cell for the rest of your life, and yet here you are still trying to implicate Will in your crimes. Hasn’t this whole destroying-his-reputation thing gotten old for you yet?”

Hannibal lets her fury sink into his pores. “I can’t say I know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, come on.”

“I haven’t had the pleasure of reading the article myself. When I spoke to Freddie Lounds, I never suggested Will was involved in any wrongdoing. If that is what she printed, then she grossly misinterpreted the little I said to her.”

Now Beverly takes a step back towards the glass. “You’re such a fucking liar.”

The more she speaks to him with her sailor’s tongue, the more he’d like to cut it out. But he can’t deny he is enjoying himself immensely. He lets his smile turn sly.

“You have tried to control what Miss Lounds publishes. You know from experience it is impossible. Why should I have better luck?”

She takes another step forward. Now there is almost nothing but glass and steel between them.

“God,” she says, with a bitter grin, “you and Freddie Lounds deserve each other. You know, Jack sent me down here with an olive branch hoping we could placate you if we just gave you something to do. But I don’t think you’re ever going to stop causing trouble, no matter what we offer you. You’re just gonna keep stirring up as much shit as you can, because that’s what you live for. Inside that cell, it’s the *only* thing you’ve got to live for. I can’t stop you from talking to Freddie Lounds, you probably know that already, but I can warn you that whatever you say to her is going to influence the judge at your bench trial, and I promise you it won’t be in your favor. So by all means, lie your face off to TattleCrime, lie to the whole world if that’s how you get your rocks off, I really don’t care. But if you keep including Will in those lies, then I’m going to personally make sure your life down here’s a living hell.”

Hannibal looks at her. He looks right into her. And with honed precision he chooses his weapon out of the armory of her own heart.

“You think you can protect Will Graham from me?”

Beverly juts her chin. “Yes.”

“Will doesn’t want your protection.”

“You don’t speak for Will.”

“Neither do you.” Then, in a voice so soft she has to lean in to hear it: “I didn’t lie to Freddie Lounds. The story she published is true.”

“I don’t care if it is,” growls Beverly.

“Yes. You do.”

She swallows heavily, but doesn’t contradict him.

“It’s your story, too,” he continues. “You chose to involve yourself in it. You stumbled in, an unwary traveler trespassing on a strange new country, with no guide except for the map Will drew you. You’d do well not to trust that map, Beverly. It doesn’t mark the places where the monsters live.”

“I trust Will,” she says, through gritted teeth.

“You don’t *understand* Will.”

She draws away from him slightly, pain and steel warring for dominance in her eyes. “Maybe not,” she says, voice shaking. “But you don’t understand him any better than I do. If you really think Will is in love with you, then you are the most delusional person inside this psychiatric hospital.”

The lids slip low over Hannibal’s eyes. “When did you last speak to Will, I wonder?”

“That’s none of your business.”

And he *smiles*. He hears the thread of hurt in Beverly’s voice. All he need do is pull that thread, pull and pull, unravel.

“That long,” he says. “I see. It’s dwindled down to emails now, hasn’t it? A few spare sentences every other week, uninformative, avoidant. He may as well be a stranger.”

He speaks without taking breath, hypnotic—his tone pins her like a butterfly to an entomologist’s board.

“When good Will took his dogs and ran away, it wasn’t me he was running from. He was running from Quantico, running from Jack. And he was running from you—wasn’t he, Beverly?”

She is staring, jaw clenched tight.

“I wonder why he was running from you,” he continues, almost breezily. “How often you must ask yourself that question. What did you do to drive him off?”

“I didn’t drive him off,” she says, but it’s feeble, only a whisper.

“Not deliberately. But you still failed him. You failed to understand him, in a moment when he needed understanding more than anything.”

Beverly’s fingers twitch; even her eyebrows tremble. He fancies he can see her carotid pulse beating riotously against the skin of her neck.

He tilts his head, his eyes like black holes gorging themselves on her pain, and suddenly he can see the moment so clearly, as clearly as if he had been a witness to it himself. He sees Will reeling, adrift on choppy seas, with Beverly the only thing in sight even remotely resembling an anchor.

And so—a clutch for balance. Oh *dear*.

“Beverly,” says Hannibal, tutting at her. “You could have at least had the decency to kiss him back.”

And she rears from the glass, eyes wide. She doesn’t understand how he can say this, how he can know this. Extracting this hurt out of her with neither the benefit of scalpel nor forceps. She is horrified. But she is horrified not because his aim is true, though he can see that it is undoubtedly. Beverly is horrified because this shocking display of Hannibal’s perceptiveness, his blistering insight, reminds her so very vividly of no one else but Will. She looks at Hannibal, sees Will, and is appalled by the association.

She can’t look at him any more. She’s off, walking back up the hallway.

“Bev,” he calls after her—and how she freezes. “Haven’t you forgotten something?”

Back she comes, clearly against her will. He stands right up at the glass, watching her as she snatches the case file out of his food tray with trembling hands. He delights in the way she refuses to catch his eye. He sidles nearer to her and quickly whispers:

“If Jack wants me to stop, then he knows what he has to do.”

And Beverly finally returns his stare, hard and brutally cold. “You,” she says, “are *never* going to see Will again.”

He can say nothing. She stalks away.

Wolf Trap: his sanctuary.

The memory has become as familiar to him as the tracery of veins on the backs of his hands, every detail of the scene a note from a song he has learned by heart. The weight of the linoleum knife in his hand. The smell of eggs frying on the pan. The scuffling of the dogs' paws against the wooden slats of the back porch. The last struggling gasp of sunset reddening the tips of Will's curls as he sits hunched in the old armchair, his face in his hands.

"Freedom," he says, with a sneer. "Hilarious, how much you love talking about my freedom. You, of all people, have no interest in me being free."

Hannibal considers him. Into the words he has uttered so many times, he carefully injects as much feeling as possible. "That's *all* I've ever wanted for you."

But Will only laughs. "You put me in a cell!"

"Yes."

"And you don't see a contradiction there?"

"No."

Will's fury abates. His eyes turn beseeching. Hannibal can actually feel the force of Will's despair, clawing at him. And Hannibal thinks to himself with utter clarity—clarity he has never before known inside the memory of Wolf Trap—*this is real*.

And it is. It is real. Not an act. Not a performance to beguile and ensnare him. This is more real than Will gutting him with the linoleum knife. For the gutting itself is mutable—but Will's despair? That is a hard fact, unchangeable. Will's despair is the primed canvas upon which Will paints the many false colors of his role-play.

"I…don't…feel…free," he says now, voice gone ancient with pain.

"No," says Hannibal. "You don't. In this moment you feel as trapped as I do."

This is not his line. Not what he said in the record of his memory. But that doesn't matter. He needs to say it, needs for Will to hear it.

Will looks at Hannibal with an expression both keen and blank, as if straining to hear music from another room. Very slowly he shakes his head.

So Hannibal tries again. "You want to come with me. You think you can't, but still you want to. You predicted this moment, you imagined it happening, you looked at it from every angle. You realize that coming with me, leaving all of this behind, is a possible outcome for you, a possible outcome for this conversation. Tell me, Will. Tell me you know it's possible."

Tears shine like evening stars in Will's eyes. "The only reason—the only reason I can't go back to the FBI—can't go back to boat motors—is because you've ruined me. You've ruined me for doing anything else."

Will sticks to the script with mechanical faithfulness. He can't tell Hannibal what Hannibal wants to hear, because he has neither Will's self-awareness nor Will's depth of feeling. This

thing sitting in Will's living room is only a memory. An echo in an empty chamber. A reflection in a broken mirror.

But despite knowing all this—despite knowing the nature of the Will he's dealing with—Hannibal keeps pressing his argument. He advances on Will.

"You want to come with me, even after everything. Those tears in your eyes are real. This role you're playing for me now; real. What comes later, your 'citizen's arrest,' that's the fiction. That's the role you're forced to play. Tell me I'm right, Will."

At this point he is kneeling in front of Will like a desperate supplicant. He grasps Will's forearm.

Will tries to twist away. "Don't touch me!"

Hannibal is supposed to release Will, supposed to let him stand and pace the living room. That's how Wolf Trap goes. But Hannibal positions himself against the flow of Wolf Trap. He maintains his hold on Will's arm.

Will twists harder, a high whine in his throat. Tears like silver ribbons down his cheeks. The light inside him pulses brightly.

"Answer me," Hannibal commands, as he traps Will in the chair. "Answer my question. Is this real? Is it?"

Will's mouth opens. He gapes up at Hannibal. A series of guttural clicks in his throat, his Adam's apple bobbing frantically. He's trying to speak. Hannibal leans in, until their eyes are inches apart. He waits for Will to find his voice.

"Ah…" says Will. "Ah… you…"

"Yes?" whispers Hannibal.

"…killed…her."

Hannibal sighs. The script, again.

Will is gasping, but he is no longer trying to pull out of Hannibal's grip.

"You… ruined… me," he continues, hell-bent on spitting out the words he's been ordained to say. "Paint…it…up…in whatever beautiful… images you want… but that's what you've done."

Hannibal's sharp fingers sink into the meat of Will's arm. "Stop this," he says.

But Will's voice only strengthens, picks up speed. "That's what you…always do! You don't make people better. *You destroy them*!"

"—I told you to stop—"

Will is shouting now. “You are a monster! A MONSTER!”

And Hannibal plunges the linoleum knife into the soft dip where Will’s throat meets his clavicle.

Will chokes. Blood spurts from the wound in his throat. But he doesn’t fight back. He can’t fight back because it isn’t the moment in Wolf Trap when he is allowed to fight back. So he doesn’t resist, doesn’t even cry out, as Hannibal drags the blade down the line of his sternum, then stabs him over and over: in the thigh, in the navel, between the ribs, in one deltoid and then the other.

Will wags his head from side to side. Gurgles. Red froth at the corners of his mouth.

Hannibal’s skin feels too tight on his bones. His heart pounds painfully inside him, pulse too fast, maddeningly fast. His heart isn’t supposed to do that. Everything is wrong. A low sound in his ears—himself grunting, wheezing, as he cuts and cuts and carves and carves and slashes. Not his usual exactitude. The clumsy gesticulations of a man without control.

“It is real,” he mutters, “It is real,” as he tears Will apart.

Blood soaks into the worn fabric of the armchair. It sprays in every direction, speckling the walls, the piano, the fireplace, Hannibal’s skin. The black puddle slowly creeps across the floorboards as it grows. Hannibal almost slips in it. Has to brace himself on the arm of the chair so he can keep slicing, even though Will at this point is just a pulpy slop of flesh and fluid.

Hannibal sees what he’s doing, disapproves of it on principle, but cannot stop.

An unearthly sound rents the air. It takes Hannibal a long moment to realize it is Will, still alive, trying to speak. The arc of the linoleum knife arrests itself in midair.

Hannibal leans close to what remains of Will’s face, his ear almost touching Will’s serrated lips.

Will says, in between rusty breaths, “I guess…”

Hannibal devotes every particle of himself to listening.

“I guess… I’m a monster… too.”

Will breathes a bubble of blood. The bubble bursts. He breathes no more.

Hannibal feels a dark flood of disappointment: in Will or in himself, he isn’t certain which. He slowly stands up, linoleum knife still clutched in his red-slicked hand.

He looks down at the mess he has made of Will. The mess he has made of Wolf Trap. This isn’t turnabout. No elegant reversal this time, a more fitting or poetical resolution to the memory. This is chaos, and can be neither rationalized nor excused. It is animal desperation merely. It shames him. He feels ashamed.

“I’m sorry, Will,” he says, to the corpse in the chair. “I ask too much.”

He drops the linoleum knife.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

This is not what happened!

Chapter Notes

Another chapter, another long delay. I prostrate myself before you guys, and thank you for your patience. This chapter is supersized, double the trouble, so I hope that makes up for the wait.

Once again some extra warnings just in case: sex, cannibalism, shades of incest, and a historical interlude wherein I'm sure I've included some factual inaccuracies. Please be kind and chalk them up to artistic license--and the quirk of memory...

This is a weird one. Buckle up.

“So?” asks Freddie, before she has even taken her seat.

This is not the politest of conversation openers, but Hannibal lets it pass unchallenged. Exposed and encaged as he is, etiquette is no longer his foremost concern. He does remain standing, however, until Freddie has settled on her folding chair. Certain niceties are always worth observing.

“You have quite an imagination,” he says as he sits on his cot. “I am amazed you were able to extrapolate our conversation into something so…overwrought.”

Freddie raises her eyebrows, faux-abashed. “Overwrought?”

He recites: “‘Leading experts in the field of criminal psychiatry are currently sounding the depths of Hannibal Lecter’s pathology, but despite their best efforts, the notorious prisoner remains a mystery; however, in the privacy of his cell, the lovelorn Lithuanian longs for a

time when he was not only understood but accepted body and soul by the man who was once tasked to profile him but ended up adoring him.'" He clicks his tongue. "Goodness me, Miss Lounds. It is like something out of a paperback romance."

"Funny you should say that," says Freddie, delighted Hannibal has memorized her article. "I used to write them. Under the name Fredericka Rosemoor. It's how I paid for journalism school."

"Were they as graphic as your article?"

"Oh, they were pretty tame. Middle America housewife bait. But as my interests changed they grew increasingly bloody, to the point where my publisher had to drop me."

"Send me a copy of your last book," Hannibal says, genuinely interested. "But you must realize that if you wish to be taken seriously as a journalist, you have to restrain yourself from the fabrication of such flagrant excesses. While I admit my therapy was often unconventional, I don't recall ever administering—how did you describe it?—'sexual healing' to any of my patients, especially not against my library ladder."

"Is that unethical?" she asks, dubious.

"It's uncomfortable," he replies, blank-faced.

Freddie inspects him with her bright bird's eyes. She can't tell if he's joking. Which is exactly how he wants it. He continues:

"And although role-playing was an aspect of my therapy program, the scenarios Will and I performed were very different from the ones you described."

"Oh, so *you* called *him* 'Daddy'?"

As soon as Freddie says this, her confidence flickers—she is worried she has gone too far. But Hannibal gives no indication he is offended. His expression of mild curiosity is set into the stone of his face; beneath it he conceals his ever-increasing amusement. Freddie's rudeness is unquestionable, but it is mitigated by her current usefulness to him and admirable nerve.

"And finally, it hardly needs saying, but the circumstances in which I received this,"—he gestures at the bite scar—"can be verified by half a dozen witnesses, and I don't imagine any of them would describe what happened as 'an instance of heavy petting turned violent.'"

"Makes a good story, though." Freddie casts herself forward on her chair. "Dr. Lecter, if you'd like to see more accuracy in my reporting, here's a suggestion: you could actually start telling me things. If there's anything in my article you'd like to refute, debunk, corroborate, or expand upon, then by all means, I'm listening."

And with a flourish of her gloved hand, she activates her digital recorder.

He smiles his sphinx's smile. Says nothing.

Indefatigable Freddie waits a full minute before shutting off the recorder and slumping back in her chair so hard it squeaks. Clearly she constructed her article as provocatively as possible in the hope of drawing Hannibal out. He admires her intent even as he thwarts it.

"Please don't mistake me, Miss Lounds. I am grateful to you. I wanted something I could use to goad Jack Crawford, and you handed me an effectively electrified prod."

Her voice hardens. "I don't think Jack Crawford was the only person you were hoping to *prod*."

His smile turns genuine; he is tickled by Freddie's efforts to prod him. They're not wholly off the mark.

"Your readership may be growing by the day," he tells her, "but I'm afraid you will never be able to count Will Graham as one of them."

"He doesn't have to read it. All he has to do is feel the pressure to defend himself against it. If you want to lure Will out of his hole, Dr. Lecter, then you're going to have to go a lot further than planting this one unattributed story."

"What do you suggest?"

Freddie's eyes brighten. "Go on the record. Allow me to conduct a real interview. With pictures, even video. Whispered implications will get you only so far. It's time to tell your story in your own words. With your own voice."

He has to hand it to Freddie: she is doing a superlative job of keeping the dollar signs out of her eyes as she makes this pitch to him. He folds his fingers in his lap, favors her with his gracious, if impassive, attention.

"You've been hiding who you are your whole life," she continues. "It's how you were able to survive so long. And I respect you for that reticence, Doctor. I really do. But you don't have to hide anymore. Now—the world wants to meet you."

A pocket of mirth is expanding inside him, pressing at his ribs. "They may think they do," he says, so softly he might be speaking only to himself.

Freddie is undeterred. "If I publish a full interview, you will be on the cover of every major magazine in the country. In the *world*." Her voice rises, as melodious as a Baptist preacher's. "Every media outlet—TV, print, digital—will run a version of your story. They'll have to ration out the sound bites, save themselves enough material for a fortnight's worth of coverage. And the blogosphere is full of would-be gumshoes who will debate and dissect your every word. Your story will be everywhere, Dr. Lecter. It will be inescapable. I guarantee you Will Graham will see it. And once he sees it, he will have to respond to you."

Hannibal lets the silence linger out of respect for her ambition, affording her time to wallow in the muddy glory of her vision.

Then he says, “Miss Lounds, if my sole desire in all of this was to make contact with Will Graham, I’d simply write him a letter.”

Her voice stabs at him. “Then why haven’t you?”

“I haven’t felt the need.”

It is the wrong version of the truth. If Hannibal had any guarantee a letter would be delivered to its intended recipient, he might feel differently. But as things stand, a letter to Will is nothing more than a letter to Jack.

Freddie watches him with mounting puzzlement. “And yet you feel the need to talk to me.”

“I like talking to you,” he says.

“But you won’t let me publish anything you say.” She shakes her head. “If this partnership is going to work, Dr. Lecter, then it has to function as a real partnership. I need more from you than nudges and hints.”

His eyes darken in his skull. “Is that an ultimatum?”

She backs down only a smidge. “It’s a request. You’ve gotta give a little to get a little.”

“Quid pro quo,” he says, with a private smile.

“Exactly.”

“You want a story you can attribute to me.”

“*Yes*.”

“All right. I’ll give you one.”

Excitement nearly lifts her off her seat. “Now we’re getting somewhere.” She flicks the recorder on again.

Hannibal says nothing. He leaves the bed and sits down at the desk instead, back straight in perfect readiness. Raising his hands in front of him, he ripples his fingers as if about to perform a trill on his harpsichord. Then he pulls the drawing paper forward, picks up a stick of Conté from its plastic tray, and begins to work.

Freddie twists in her chair, trying to get a better look. She yearns to question him, but her trusty instincts are telling her to wait.

He finishes, separates the paper from the pad, and slides it into his food tray. She pulls it through. Holds it out in front of her like it’s a scrap of papyrus scavenged from the lost Library of Alexandria.

“This,” she says slowly, “is a recipe for soup.”

“Crème de Boudin Noir.” He adds, “Boudin noir is blood sausage.”

Freddie raises an eyebrow. “I’m not a food blog.”

“If you’re writing about my case, Miss Lounds, then a food blog is exactly what you are.”

Oh, she knows. Her gloved fingers stroke the edges of the paper as she reads and reads and reads again.

“One-third of a pound of lean ‘pork.’ Thirteen ounces of fresh ‘pork’ blood.” She looks up, mouth quirked. “You’ve put quotation marks around the word ‘pork.’”

“So I have,” says Hannibal, pleasantly.

TattleCrime runs the recipe with the banner headline: **From the Kitchen of Hannibal Lecter**. It’s printed without commentary, only an italicized postscript with the date Hannibal gave Freddie the recipe, her sly way of confirming her exclusive access to him. But her true blockbuster of an editorial contribution—so ingenious Hannibal wishes he thought of it himself—is that she has given him the byline and his own title: “Special Correspondent.”

The reading public eats it up. By popular demand, Freddie scans and publishes the original drawing paper so everyone can see the recipe written out in Hannibal’s elegant script. Amateur detectives, handwriting experts, and chefs pore over the image for insights into Hannibal’s agenda, his state of mind, and his culinary influences; meanwhile legal experts speculate on what impact this recipe—only the most tacit admission of guilt—might have on his trial. Inside the cradle created by his quotation marks, everyone imagines the unspeakable. Who was ‘pork’?

Freddie posts a follow-up with emails from her readers, in turn criticizing and celebrating her choice to run the recipe. Some even submit photos of their own attempts at crème de boudin noir, having followed Hannibal’s instructions step-by-step, diverging only in their substitution of pork for ‘pork.’

When Freddie returns for another visit, Hannibal has a new recipe already written out for her: ‘Lamb’ Kidneys in Mustard Sauce. The next week it’s ‘Beef’ Heart Tartare. She presses him for more information on who went into the dishes and who ate them, but Hannibal only angles his head at her like a hyper-intelligent python.

Freddie’s patience for the silent treatment is wearing thin. “You can play this game as long as you like, but eventually the novelty’s going to wear off. People are hungry for more than just recipes.”

“Then I shall find a way to feed them,” he says, slipping through the food slot his recipe for ‘Chicken’ à la Maryland.

More, more, more; we want more; give us more. *Another piece, another taste*. It's Freddie's refrain. The world's refrain. Everyone wants something from Hannibal Lecter. He is not accustomed to being always in this position of giving. It is a good thing he happens to be generous.

Dr. Chilton also clamors for more. Their therapy sessions, once relaxed and almost civilized affairs, now resemble interrogations. Hannibal is barraged with indelicate questions about Will: Does he fantasize about him? Does he daydream of Will imprisoned, moon-eyed and begging? Will narcotized into pliancy beneath leather restraints? Will splayed naked on a dining table like a Christmas goose? Does Hannibal imagine such things while touching himself? These queries Chilton fires off at a mile a minute, interrupting Hannibal as soon as it's apparent he's getting a rote response, and then posing rephrased versions of the same question over and over, hoping Hannibal will answer differently if only to stop the tedium.

Needless to say, Chilton fails to wring any intimate disclosures from his patient. Hannibal watches with careful appraisal as Chilton's frustrations heat and bubble. He will have to act soon lest those frustrations boil over. Chilton is no good to him as a rigid inquisitor; he prefers the man complacent, his attention lax.

Hannibal's caginess in therapy isn't entirely for show. It really is difficult for him to hear Will discussed in such dehumanizing terms. He feels Dr. Chilton is only trying to denigrate Will's intelligence and insight by casting him as a dead-eyed automaton in some grubby dumbshow within Hannibal's mind. It's puerile, offensive. Rude. There are days Hannibal can't bear it. He is increasingly moved by the powerful desire to protect Will from Chilton. It is the least Hannibal can do for Will, considering his own terrible transgression against him inside his memory.

Wolf Trap haunts him like never before. The truth—the shameful truth Hannibal can no longer deny—is that he appears to have damaged the memory. Ever since the loss of control that resulted in him tearing Will to pieces, Wolf Trap has been knocked askew. Whenever Hannibal returns there, he finds something altered, some detail incorrect. In one replay, the curtains in Will's kitchen have changed color. In the next, the curtains are their usual shade, but there are no plates in the cupboards, forcing Hannibal to serve his omelets in cereal bowls instead. Another time, Will walks through the front door with seven dogs leashed, but by the time Hannibal helps tie them to the back porch there are only six. And then there is the replay where everything is in its right place and number, except halfway through the memory the sun freezes right on the cusp of setting, flooding the rooms of Will's house with unchanging fiery light.

The deviations are slight, so nonessential to proceedings that Hannibal often wonders if he's imagining them. These little hiccups might not be symptoms of structural damage after all, merely manifestations of his disquiet and guilt at having so mishandled his own recollection. And in the end, how can he be sure his memory has changed? Maybe the living room has always been this size. Maybe the old armchair has always smelled faintly of smoke. Maybe the crickets never sang in Wolf Trap after all. What means of comparison can he use to gauge

these changes other than what is set down in the record of his mind? And his mind is playing tricks.

But by some act of grace, these alterations—if they really are alterations—never touch the memory of Will. Every time he steps through the front door of his house, Will is whole and unprofaned. The bed may switch places with the desk, the water from the kitchen sink may run a sludgy brown, but Will is still Will: prickly and brittle, coldly despairing, and ready at any moment to launch into a wild flight of rage. He remains impossible for Hannibal to understand, impossible for Hannibal to trust, illuminated from within by a clear light that shines ever on. Wolf Trap might lapse and skip around him, but Will endures.

(Except… But perhaps Hannibal is mistaken; it is so brief. He is back at the beginning of the memory: in the living room awaiting Will's homecoming. He watches through the window as Will and Jack exchange farewells in the driveway. Jack departs, leaving Will standing like a sentry in the falling darkness, surrounded by his warm pack of dogs. For several long minutes Will stands there, motionless. He takes this gathering pause in every iteration of the memory; it is not unusual. But this time…this time… Will turns and looks right at the window of his little house, the window through which Hannibal is watching him. Will focuses his flat forceful stare at the gridded windowpane, his face as distant and inscrutable as the lunar surface, and Hannibal shivers, spellbound. Can Will see him? Does he know…what does he know? Hannibal's heart slips its moorings and speeds—*this is not what happened*—but then Will breaks the stare, nudges the dogs forward. He leads them up the porch steps and the moment is over. The memory resumes as normal.)

These glitches are undoubtedly disturbing, but they don't frighten Hannibal away from Wolf Trap. He is convinced he can repair the memory by replaying it from beginning to end, smoothing out its creases through frequent repetition until the memory remembers itself. Meddling no longer tempts him; no more rewriting the events of Wolf Trap in Will's blood instead of his own. He knows the dangers now. Instead he appoints himself Wolf Trap's dutiful custodian, tirelessly charting the anomalies and correcting them whenever possible. If he spies the floor lamp sitting in the wrong corner of the living room, he scrambles like a stagehand and replaces it before Will enters the scene. These small acts of restitution make him feel more secure. With time he is confident he can set Wolf Trap back to right.

But in the meantime, the state of the memory plagues him, riddles him with concern and regret. These emotions are hard to manage: he so seldom feels regret.

His feelings leap to the surface in the middle of a session of word association.

"Will Graham," says Dr. Chilton.

"Friend," says Hannibal.

"Will Graham."

"Patient."

"Will Graham."

“Mongoose.”

“Will Graham.”

“Mirror.”

And so on. But when Chilton says, “Will Graham,” for the twenty-sixth time, Hannibal feels his lips forming the word, “Onycophagia.”

This is a new answer. Chilton stops the game.

“Nail biting?”

Hannibal says nothing; he is inside himself, mapping the serpentine pathways by which this word journeyed from his mind to his tongue.

Chilton does some of the work for him. “Will Graham’s case was quite acute by the end of his time here. What did you make of his impulse control problem? Did it worry you?”

Hannibal is still not prepared to answer. He looks down at his own hands, cuffed to a metal brace on the table. His nails are rosy, clean, and trimmed.

Why onycophagia? Why this word?

Hannibal always interpreted Will’s nail biting as a mild expression of his self-destructive tendencies. During therapy Hannibal often advised him to take up some healthier substitute, to find something to destroy other than himself. But as he stares at his own undamaged nails, Hannibal realizes how deeply he fears for Will, the real Will. What state are his nails in now? He is alone, unanchored, unmonitored. Free to replace his bad habit with something even worse. It is doubly cruel that Hannibal has mutilated Will inside his mind just as Will is mutilating himself in the outer world. Why must Will suffer everywhere?

Chilton notes this long period of silence on his clipboard. “Hannibal?” he prompts. “How did you interpret Will’s nail biting?”

Wolf Trap hangs over him like a death shroud, pressing against his mouth and eyes. He doesn’t feel like talking about Will any more. So Hannibal falls back on his tried and tested method for distracting Chilton: he brings up the subject of cannibalism.

“Some classify nail biting as a form of self-cannibalism,” he announces apropos of not very much.

As calculated, this secures Chilton’s total attention. “Is that how you classify it?”

“I prefer to think of it as a method for externalizing internal disturbances. Wearing your pain on your sleeve.”

“That description could be applied to any number of compulsive behaviors.” Chilton regards Hannibal with half a smile, then adds pointedly, “Even to cannibalism.”

Hannibal sniffs. “My eating habits were not compulsive.”

Of course Chilton doesn’t believe him. “Did you ever try to stop?”

“I had no desire to stop.”

“Because you enjoyed it too much to stop.”

“I believe we were discussing onycophagia.” Hannibal blinks rapidly as if the fluorescent lights in the Coffee Room have shockingly increased in wattage. It has the right effect: Chilton pursues his new line of questioning with single-minded fervor.

“If your cannibalism wasn’t compulsive, then why did you do it? What need were you fulfilling by eating human flesh?”

“The same need you fulfill by eating pork.”

“Ah-ha. That’s different.”

“Why is it different?”

“I’m not a pig.”

Unfortunately Hannibal has to leave this where it lies. Instead he says, “You purchase a vacuum-sealed package at the meat counter of your local supermarket and never even question its provenance. It is a habit: ingrained, unexamined. You have your habits, Dr. Chilton. I have mine.”

Chilton smile is approaching a sneer. “Now you know your habit is significantly harder to maintain than mine. You are a perceptive man, Hannibal. Self-possessed. I can’t believe you’ve never analyzed your own behavior, particular those behaviors you’re driven to practice compulsively.”

Hannibal doesn’t have to work very hard to appear needled; it’s impossible to relish hearing the word ‘compulsive’ connected with himself.

“If hunger is compulsive,” he says, “then it’s an affliction shared by all living creatures.”

Chilton is watching him closely. “I wonder…when did you first become hungry? How did you develop a taste for your, ah, *favorite meat*?”

Now Hannibal looks away. His eyelids are heavy and his eyes matte black. He erects the silence around himself like the walls of a fortress—but then he opens the front gate.

“I don’t recall,” he says.

Chilton’s eyebrows buck. “You don’t recall.”

“I’m afraid not.” Hannibal’s voice is velvet-soft.

“You don’t remember the first time you ate a human being?”

“No.”

It is the wrong version of the truth.

Beneath the glittering halls and stately galleries of his memory palace, there lies his secret cellar—cloaked in cobwebs, thick with dust, its single stinking oubliette gored into the unforgiving stone of the building’s foundations. The oubliette is bolted and sealed. But he could unlock it if he cared to. If he dared to.

Chilton lays down his pen. Cocks his head, all reproachful disbelief. “Your memory is impeccable. You remember conversations from your residency at Johns Hopkins word for word, and yet you’re telling me you don’t remember a single thing about the circumstances in which you first became a cannibal?”

Hannibal adjusts the planes of his face until he looks the very picture of polite embarrassment. “The vagaries of memory baffle me just as much as they baffle you, Doctor. Trifles stick with us; the necessities slip away. My memory is as fallible as anyone’s.”

Perfect honesty, as Wolf Trap can attest.

But Chilton is convinced he’s lying. “You promised you’d cooperate, Hannibal.”

“I am cooperating. But I cannot force my memory to do the same.”

A sly light kindles in Chilton’s eyes. “Well…maybe I can help with that.”

“Maybe you can.”

Hannibal is counting on it.

The orderlies come for him just before lights-out. Hannibal cannot greet them; he has just performed the last of his forty sit-ups and he is too breathless.

The head orderly Gornergrat looms over Hannibal with arms crossed. “Hands against the wall,” he orders. “You’re coming with us.”

“At this hour?” Hannibal says, between pants. “Do I have a visitor?”

“You’ll find out when we get there. Now up and at ‘em.”

Hannibal climbs to his feet, braces himself against the sink. His workout has filmed him over with a fine layer of perspiration. “Pardon me, gentlemen; first I have to wash.”

But Gornergrat isn't interested. "We're coming in. Get in position; you know the drill."

"One minute, please."

Hannibal insists out of principle; he so despises bullies. Dawdling at the sink, he splashes his face and fills a paper cup with water as he conducts a series of calculations. It is no coincidence the orderlies are here at precisely the time when he is at his most physically vulnerable. Chilton has been watching him very closely it seems.

"Hands against the wall," Gornergrat barks, "or Matthews here is gonna tase you."

There is a Taser on Barney's belt, but Barney doesn't look about to use it. "Why can't he have some water first?" he asks Gornergrat under his breath.

Gornergrat's pale blue eyes seem to spark. "The man hasn't earned any sweet treatment from us. You give him what he wants, he's never gonna stop asking for more. Lecter, for the last time: hands against the wall."

Hannibal finishes his water before doing as he's told. Gornergrat grips his sweat-damp shoulders with extra force as he cuffs him. Barney looks on, thin-mouthed, as Gornergrat marches Hannibal out of the cell.

They take him to an office on the third floor, cleared of furniture save for an exam chair with leather restraints and a mounted light. Chilton is already there, leaning over a medicine cart, humming as he preps a syringe.

"This secrecy is hardly necessary," Hannibal tells him as the orderlies strap him to the chair. "If you wish to conduct a narcoanalytic interview, Doctor, you need only ask."

"This isn't secrecy," sniffs Chilton. "Everything here is perfectly aboveboard." To demonstrate, he slides a clipboard with a consent form under Hannibal's restrained right hand and laces a pen between his fingers.

Hannibal eyes the row of hypodermics on Chilton's cart. "Then why this back room at an irregular hour? Are you trying to spare your staff the sound of screams?"

"Planning on screaming, Hannibal?"

"I? No." His limited mobility prevents him from autographing the form with his usual flourish. Instead he scratches out 'HL'."

"You know my stance on chemical intervention in memory recovery," he says. "We've discussed its merits at length. And we discovered its limitations in this very room, as you might remember."

Chilton feigns innocence, badly. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Hannibal smiles faintly. "Seems I'm not the only one with memory trouble."

In slides the catheter. On snaps the light. Hannibal's pupils shrink to pricks. A lank strand of hair has fallen over his face, but the leather straps prevent him from fixing it. Sweat dries gritty on his skin and his wound aches in time to the noisy second hand of Chilton's Omega wristwatch. Amobarbital is a short-acting barbiturate. Its molecules are currently dispersing through his bloodstream, seeking out select receptors in his central nervous system to which they might bind themselves, thereby inhibiting neuronal activity and inducing him to lower his defenses.

"You might begin to feel sleepy," Chilton tells him, as if he doesn't know, "but I'd like you to stay awake."

"I'm awake." Hannibal is aware of his breathing slowing down, his heart rate crawling. The fist of his mind wants to unclench. He allows this to happen—up to a point. In his experience, the most effective way of maintaining control while under the influence of a narcotic is to accept and embrace control's loss.

Chilton begins by lobbing lowballs. He asks Hannibal his name, his age, his birth country, his present location. Standard procedure: Chilton is waiting for the drug to take full effect. So Hannibal obliges him, thickening his accent until his answers are each one long slur. And then he goes further. When Chilton asks him why he abandoned his career as a surgeon, he says:

"A patient died on my table. *Une petite fille*. *Je n'ai pas pu la sauver*. *A ma honte*, *la mort était hors de mon contrôle."*

An awkward snicker from Chilton. " No, Hannibal. Uh… *Parlez en anglais, s'il vous plait*."

Hannibal eyes him blearily. "Ah? *Pardon*. I thought I was…"

Chilton glances at the two nurses standing by. "I think we're ready to begin." The nurses switch off the overhead lights. Now the only source of light in the room is the one mounted to the chair, burning its peptic halo into the backs of Hannibal's eyes.

Chilton leans in. "Tell me again about the patient who died on your table. In English this time, please."

Hannibal tries to clears his sticky throat. "Her chest and right leg were crushed in a car accident. She was hemorrhaging rapidly. I was unable to stop the bleeding in time."

"A frequent occurrence," says Chilton, "for a trauma surgeon in an emergency room."

"Not so frequent." Even in his addled state Hannibal is annoyed at Chilton's generalizations about a career he never held down himself. "Not for me."

"Why was this patient different?"

Hannibal's throat makes a strange sound, a glottal stop. "She was a child."

Chilton takes this in. "You killed a child." He rolls this information on his tongue. "A child. Hmm. You've killed many people, Hannibal. Many different kinds of people. Men, women—

different occupations, different races, different classes. You don't discriminate. But you don't kill children."

"I kill the rude," says Hannibal. "The inexcusably rude. Children I excuse their rudeness."

"So you thought this little girl on your table didn't deserve to die."

"I needed to save her."

With this, Hannibal shuts his eyes. The fug of amobarbital does not impede his ability to enter his memory palace—in fact his sanctuary appears more vivid than ever. The galleries pulse with color and texture, but there is no time for him to admire the art. He walks to the end of the main hall, presses the heel of his hand against a blank stretch of wall. It pivots backwards, revealing the secret steps.

"Why did you need to save this little girl?" Chilton is asking. "Why was it so important to you?"

"She reminded me of someone I loved."

Hannibal's feet, clad in his slick Italian loafers, slowly descend the winding steps. He guides himself by ghosting his fingers over the wall on his right. The stone drips cold slime. It would be better if he had a torch. As soon as he thinks this, he finds himself holding one.

"Who?" asks Chilton, eyes wide.

Hannibal reaches the final step, but he doesn't alight onto the cellar floor. Not yet. He must acclimate. The air is so thick it pushes him backwards, the stench of decay lancing through his sinuses.

He lifts the torch above his head so he might see the floor. The oubliette looks the same as ever, its iron-studded wooden door tightly sealed by a cat's cradle of chains and bars. The torch flickers, buffeted by the dungeon draught. The shivering light creates shadows so strange, so deceptive, that it takes Hannibal a moment to notice the chains undulating. They clink together as they slide apart, the bars lumbering back and back. Before his eyes, the oubliette door unlocks itself.

"Hannibal, you mustn't sleep." Chilton dips right into his face. "Open your eyes, Hannibal. Look at me. There. Good. Now can you tell me about the person you loved? Was she a little girl like your patient?"

"Yes. A little girl."

"What was her name?"

With a plangent wail as familiar as a lullaby, the door to the oubliette cracks open.

"Ombra," says Hannibal. "She was my sister."

Chilton looks oh so hungry. "Tell me about your sister."

Hannibal creeps forward, peering into the black maw revealed by the open door. The oubliette is not a shallow cell: it stretches down, down, forever down. A hole in the floor of his mind.

“Tell me about your sister, Hannibal.”

The bulk of Hannibal’s attention is not with Chilton, but inside his memory palace at the edge of the gaping oubliette. He angles the torch, shines a sliver of hesitant firelight into the abyss. A sliver is all that is required of him in order to tell Chilton the story he demands. For that is all this is: a story. The story of Anniba and Ombra. Two lost children in a forest that has lost its name. There are many stories like this one. Some of them are even true.

Hannibal is too deeply embedded in his own mind to hear the exact words he speaks to Chilton. But this is roughly what he says:

In a place called Vilkpėdė there lived a boy and his parents. The land they lived on was blood-soaked: the Nazis had buried the corpses of one hundred thousand people in Paneriei forest, just seven kilometers away. In the boy’s time, the country belonged to the Soviet Union; had he lived in another age, however, things would have been very different. His family would not have resided in the grotty cement labyrinth of Vilkpėdė. Instead their home would have been the peaceful green estate that had once belonged to his father’s family. Two generations back they had been aristocrats: wealthy people with servants, cooks, and tutors at their beck. But when the Poles invaded Lithuania in 1920, they confiscated the estate, and his father’s family never got it back. The Russians claimed it next, then the Germans burned it, and when it finally passed back into Russian hands, they carved it up into collectivized farmland. As the boy’s father repeated endlessly, if they were ever to return to their ancestral home, they would not recognize it. His father often bemoaned lost things, a better way of life that fate and circumstance had denied them. The boy listened to this steady refrain, not understanding it.

His father was a pragmatic man. The rage and resentment he felt at home never followed him to the office, where he made his meager living as a civil engineer and a low level Party bureaucrat. He worked long hours and found everyone he worked with—particularly the Russians—despicable. Collaborators he reviled, even as he collaborated with them, but he never saw this as hypocrisy. “We do what we do,” he told the boy, “in order to survive.”

The boy’s mother had wanted to be a professor: she was well lettered, spoke seven languages, and played five instruments. But her whole family had been exiled to Siberia when she was a teenager, and although she had long been pardoned for her supposed crimes against the Soviet Republic, her status as a former exile prevented her from finding work as a teacher. Instead she was a seamstress at a factory. But she still had one pupil: her son. She taught him out of whatever books she could buy on the black market: a haphazard collection of Polish fairy tales, German physics, French poetry, English political theory, classical Greek natural

philosophy. She also had in her possession a few treasured volumes her family had managed to save during their exile. The boy's favorite was Dante's *Divine Comedy* in its original Italian, its worn leather embossed with twisted figures, climbing flames, and angels' wings that he loved to run his fingertips over.

His mother was a firm and focused instructor; her pupil absorbed his education as readily as his lungs took in air. And when he was five years old, a second pupil was added to the little schoolhouse.

She had dark eyes like his. A wide mouth like his. And when her hair grew in, it was rigidly straight and straw-colored just like his. When he first saw her, wrinkled and bundled in his mother's arms, he knew she belonged to him, and he to her.

Her first bed was a laundry basket, and he would kneel down before it for hours on end, watching the way she twitched her little fingers in her sleep. "She dreams of playing the piano," he later told his mother with simple confidence. He could always divine his sister's dreams, and when she grew older she divined his. He called her by the nickname *Ombra*, 'shadow' in Italian, because she was always in his wake. Meanwhile she called him *Anniba*, even when she grew old enough to pronounce it properly.

Ombra proved herself to be very musical. She had an arresting singing voice, loud and darkly textured, and her mother taught her hymns and dainos, none of which she was allowed to sing outside the house. The Communists frowned on religious music, Lithuanian folk songs, and almost everything hailing out of the West. But that didn't stop their mother. Through the black market she found them records: Bach, Tartini, Schubert, Chopin, Puccini, Debussey, Bartók, Elgar. She rented a room in a music college twice a week so they could learn the piano. In public they played only Russian music. But at home Anniba drew a keyboard on the bedroom windowsill, and here he and Ombra played works by all their favorite composers, the notes sounding light and resonant inside their minds. They often stood shoulder to shoulder so that they might play Bizet's *Jeux d'Enfants*, a fourhanded duet.

While the girl was the superior singer, the boy was the more natural pianist.

"You have beautiful hands," their mother told him during a lesson. "Steady and strong. You'll make your living with them, mark my words."

Afterwards, while rehearsing on the windowsill, Ombra demanded, "Let me see your hands," and pulled them off the imaginary keys. She didn't like the idea that her brother should excel her at something. Clutching his hands right up against the bridge of her nose, she scrutinized his fingers with beady eyes. Finally she said, "They are exactly the same as mine."

The boy laughed. "For one thing, they're much bigger than yours."

"No. They are just the same."

Amused, Anniba took back his hands and then held them out, palms facing her. She understood what he was suggesting without him needing to explain, and touched her own little palms to his. Her hands only came up to the first joint of his fingers.

But Ombra refused to admit defeat. “Someday my hands will be the same size as yours, Anniba. We will always be the same in every way.”

She was right, of course. They were just the same—on the inside. The same sensibility, the same uncontrollable emotions. But their parents treated them very differently. They praised Anniba’s behavior at every turn. In their eyes he could do no wrong—although the truth was he did wrong with great flourish and frequency, but they rarely caught him at it. Ombra, on the other hand, was reckless in her rule breaking, and was always being punished for some misstep or other. She ran inside the house, her normal speaking voice was just shy of a scream, and she cried whenever their mother tried to comb her hair.

This was hard on their mother. After having spent so many of her best years in a labor camp at the fringes of civilization, she worshipped but two deities: God and good manners. Even when food shortages forced them to eat watery stew and stale bread, she insisted on spreading an old lace tablecloth over the dinner table. She was never seen outside the house without her neat white gloves, and the clothes she made for her children were solid and well cut. Clad in these clever garments, Anniba and Ombra always looked wealthier and better fed than they actually were. Knowing how much his mother valued these clothes, Anniba kept his shirts and slacks like new. But it seemed the very moment a new dress was pulled over Ombra’s head, it became ragged and stained.

“You are a little savage,” their mother scolded her.

Ombra didn’t deny it. But she said, “Anniba is a savage, too.”

Their mother clicked her tongue. “Don’t say such things about your brother.”

Their parents, though intelligent and perseverant people, were ordinary at heart. But by some fateful accident of nature, they had produced two offspring who were uncomfortably strange. Anniba and Ombra were intense, perceptive, insatiably inquisitive children, both possessing an inner wildness that was only amplified in each other’s company. They rarely planned their mischiefs together. Instead one of them would hatch a scheme, and quietly embark on it until the other caught on. When this happened—as it inevitably did; it was impossible for the siblings to hide things from each other—the originator of the mischief always said, “Tell me to stop.” “Tell me to stop” wasn’t a plea, but a statement of defiance. Not once in their lives had Anniba or Ombra ever told the other to stop. “Tell me to stop” was an invitation for one sibling to join the other in the mischief making. And that invitation was always accepted.

They took things apart to see how they worked, lit things on fire to watch how they burned. When they found a dead mouse in the gutter, they wrapped it in Ombra’s dirty handkerchief, spirited it home, and enclosed it in a glass jar, observing in the ensuing days as the corpse putrefied and birthed pale maggots. Once the boy cut open his hand (“Tell me to stop”) and the girl spread aside his skin like a curtain (“Tell me to stop”) so that they could see his bones. Ombra was hard at work sewing him back together with a needle sterilized in their father’s vodka when their mother walked in on them and almost fainted.

Anniba taught himself to pick locks, and then his sister insisted he teach her; from then on they spent their nights exploring. They slipped into their neighbors’ houses to read their books—or, during food shortages, to raid their pantries. Once they broke into a power station

to watch the generators pump. But their favorite pastime was walking all the way to the forest of Paneriei so they might touch the earth where the Jews were buried.

When they were both old enough, they attended public school. The sanitized and Russified curriculum bored them desperately. Anniba had inherited his father's pragmatism and learned to endure and even prosper in the Soviet machine. Quiet, polite, and feigning obedience when he needed to, he soon had his teachers under his thrall. But poor Ombra was the bane of her classroom. She didn't understand why they had to speak Russian at school and was frequently reprimanded for insulting her teachers in Lithuanian, German, French, Italian, and English. When her father tried to lecture her on the importance of showing respect for one's elders and following rules, Ombra would simply counter, "*Why*?"

The rest of the family understood that in order to get by in the country they lived in—an occupied territory full of secret police, detainment, and paranoia—then they had to hide who they really were. But Ombra refused to hide. Maybe she didn't know how. Maybe there simply was too much of her to contain and conceal. Her brother worried about this, even as he envied it.

One night they snuck out of their bedroom and ventured out to the railroad tracks. They lay together in the long grass, the moon shining down on them like a searchlight, and as a train approached, Ombra cradled her brother's hand to her chest.

"You realize," she said, in a strange grave voice, "that you and I will have to marry, someday."

"Why do you say that?" he asked her, surprised.

"Because there will never be anyone else in the world for you but me."

Ombra brought his hand up to her lips; as she kissed him, the train protested its disappearance into the tunnel with a high shriek. His skin burned with the touch of her mouth. When he pulled their joined hands back towards himself, he was surprised to find she hadn't left a mark. With infinite tenderness and gentleness, he raised their hands to his lips and returned the kiss.

When he was twelve and his sister was seven, their father started coughing. Within a week he was too sick to work and lay writhing on his bed. His neck began to swell, until his chin had disappeared into the bulge. Diphtheria, the doctors said. Three days later he was dead.

It was the end of his family's comfortable existence, such as it had been. Their mother, with her exile's record, couldn't secure a better job to support them. Their soups and stews grew thinner and thinner until they were little more than broth, and the family grew thin to match. They were sick that winter, and instead of the sounds of Ombra's singing, canticles of coughing filled the house. Their mother was so ill and poorly nourished that her hair began falling out. Their situation was unsustainable.

Without informing her children of her plans, their mother began arranging for West German passports so that the family might sneak past the Iron Curtain and live with their father's great uncle in Paris. But the document forger with whom she traded favors turned out to be a

KGB agent. She was arrested on her way home from the factory, and the children never saw her again. Anniba would find out years later that rather than be sent back to Siberia, she hanged herself in her prison cell. He often imagined how the guards found her: hanging from the bars by a length of ripped underskirt, her white-gloved hands dangling at her sides.

Men came in the night to take Anniba and Ombra away. They were forced to leave behind the black market books and music, the weathered copy of Dante, the lace tablecloth, and the windowsill piano. Party workers from their father's office, out of respect for their dead colleague, pulled some strings so that the brother and sister could stay together. The only catch was that none of the overcrowded Lithuanian orphanages had space for both of them. Instead they were sent by train to the depths of Russia.

Their new home was a squat stone building in a small village of peasants and farmers, hemmed in on one side by a mountain range and on the other by a forest. Both the village and the forest had been renamed when Stalin came to power, and not even the oldest adults remembered what they had been called originally. Anniba and Ombra felt just as forgotten. The orphanage was a hard unforgiving place, full of ill-bred, unloved children who slept with loose nails under their pillows. Their scholastic instruction—Russified or otherwise—was over. Instead their caregivers lent them out to nearby collective farms, telling the orphans how important these skills would be for later life while diligently pocketing their earnings. Every morning Anniba and Ombra tilled, plowed, and picked. They fed the pigs, collected eggs from the chickens. They learned how to milk cows, and how to butcher them.

Anniba learned the rules as quickly as he could so he might begin undermining them. He found his own loose nail, longer and rustier than all the rest, and trained himself over the course of several months to subsist on only two hours of sleep. Soon the other boys stopped trying to steal his things at night. He hoarded food in a compartment in his mattress to split between himself and Ombra. Although the boys and girls of the orphanage lived separately, he found ways of keeping watch on her. But Ombra was perfectly capable of defending herself. She was especially fond of scratching the eyes and forearms of any orphans unwise enough to challenge her. It didn't take the caregivers long to become familiar with her tendencies; they kept her declawed, but even without fingernails Ombra left welts.

Anniba and Ombra eked out a life in that orphanage for two long years. They had never been well fed at home, but now they starved. Anniba forgot what it was like to go to bed with a full stomach, and the second winter his resistance was so worn down he caught pneumonia. Meanwhile Ombra contracted scabies, and redirected her scratching upon herself. But physical deprivation was nothing next to the loss of their education. How they missed their books and music, the opportunities to experiment and explore. It was a constant gnawing ache fiercer than hunger pangs.

Anniba knew that without an education they had no future except toil and deprivation. So he resolved to liberate them using the only tool in his possession: his charm. He set out to make himself indispensable to the workings of their little institution. In the fields he worked faster than any of the other farmhands; he repaired the old thresher, suggested to his overseer a better method for irrigating the crops and volunteered to dig the new drains himself, and assisted with his steady hands at calvings. In the orphanage he washed dishes, sewed clothes, replaced loose shingles on the roof, and at nights began extolling the greatness of Lenin to

the other children. He listened to the complaints of the orphanage staff, grew fluent in the power dynamics of their insulated bureaucracy, and slowly went about earning everyone's trust. Soon the head caregiver began calling him 'comrade' and slipped him extra portions of dinner.

But however many times Anniba explained his strategy to Ombra, she didn't understand it—or rather, she refused to. She continued brawling with the other children and remained an inefficient worker wherever the caregivers placed her. She abandoned her posts on the farms to pick flowers or to stroke the goats. Meanwhile the kitchen was out of bounds to her on account of her fondness for knives. The only area where she excelled was in butchery, but she wasn't often trusted to do it.

In fact, Anniba's increased status inside the orphanage only seemed to make Ombra more disruptive, as if she had to compensate for her brother's orderly behavior with absolute anarchy.

"They wouldn't love you if they knew what you were really like," she grumbled one day.

"Ombra"—Anniba was losing patience—"that's the *point*."

"But I love you anyway." And Ombra's eyes burned with the force of it. "For who you really are."

The look on her face immediately made him regret his earlier exasperation. "I know," he said, kissing her hand. "And I love you."

Not long after this conversation, Ombra snuck out of her bed and into the boys' dormitory. She knelt by Anniba's bed and saw his eyes were open.

"Tell me to stop," she whispered.

And though it grieved him, he mouthed back, "Stop."

She looked disappointed as she slunk away. But she didn't heed him. Instead she picked the lock on the front door, jumped the fence, and unlatched the orphanage's chicken coop. The foxes got in and mauled the birds; most were either killed or scattered into the forest.

The caregivers suspected Ombra was responsible, but as she refused to confess, her guilt was collectivized among all the orphans. Their eggless dinner portions were cut in half and they were given extra chores. As it turned out, this was the most effective punishment for Ombra the caregivers could have devised.

Four of the oldest boys cornered her one afternoon in the grain cellar. They had fashioned makeshift clubs from table legs and rake handles, and one of them carried a razor; Ombra's blunt fingernails were vastly outgunned. But Anniba, who had suspected the boys would try something like this, followed them down to the cellar and jumped into the fray to defend his sister. With the pestle he had stolen from the kitchen, Anniba struck one boy unconscious and beat two others until they ran off. The fourth boy—the one with the razor—he killed. Skull crushed in, bone shards flying, brains spattered into barrels full of seeds.

Even in the immediate aftermath, buzzy and gasping, body sticky with his own blood and theirs, Anniba did not regret killing this boy, who might have done the same to Ombra. Four almost-grown boys against one scrawny nine-year-old girl—detestably unfair. What Anniba regretted was that this act of violence undermined all his hard work distinguishing himself inside the orphanage. Now he would be sent away to an institution for delinquent children, maybe even to a gulag. Ombra would be left all alone in this big house where everybody hated her. That couldn't happen.

So with one bloody hand he grabbed the heaving shoulder of his crying sister and they made a run for it. They had to be quick; the other boys were sure to report what they had seen. Ombra calmed down enough to pick the lock on the front door, and together they ran across the yard and climbed the gate.

It was the middle of winter, and they were wearing neither jackets nor boots. The wise course of action would have been for them to find shelter in a barn or in one of the farmhouses. But there simply wasn't time: the caregivers had already unleashed the hounds. They could hear the whole pack baying, the sounds as piercing as gunshots. So they kept running through the frozen fields, icy breath spraying from their lips, blood falling off them into the snow. They reached the forest and kept running. Eventually they left the sounds of the dogs behind.

They walked for two days, eating nothing but snow. Anniba's wounds began to swell and ache. By the morning of the third day he was feverish, and as he walked, the surrounding trees seemed to ripple like a curtain before a show. Ombra held his hand tightly, making sure he didn't stumble, and all the while she sang old dainos their mother had taught them. Her sharp voice rang out, defiant in the gloom. They searched for a town, a village, a lone house, any place at all with food and warmth. But there was only forest, endless stretches of forest, a forest with a forgotten name.

On their third night, they saw the telltale glow of fire through the trees. Ombra dragged Anniba forward, almost stumbling in her haste to reach it. They crashed out of the thicket and came upon a campfire, and huddled around it was a ragtag group of men, skeletally thin, faces blasted red from cold.

"Please," Ombra begged them. "My brother's sick."

This band of refugees turned out to be runaways from a gulag. All of them were scarred and shadow-eyed. Many were missing teeth or eyes. They were making their way slowly west, back to their families, they said. At first they were kind to the children. They beckoned them to sit by the fire, and one of the men draped a threadbare blanket around Anniba's shoulders.

Ombra stuck by Anniba's side, his hand cold in her grip. She asked the men if she and her brother could stay with them. "Of course," their leader said. He was a big man with a bleached-bone face. "We aren't savages. You may travel with us. We ask for only one thing in return. You see, we have been hunting in this forest for almost three weeks now, and there are no more animals left for us to eat."

"I'm a good hunter," Ombra said. "I can help you. And my brother can, too, when he gets better."

The big man stood up, the campfire throwing heavy shadows on his face. “Your brother,” he told Ombra, “isn’t going to get better.”

Men lurched around the fire towards the siblings. They tugged them apart—or at least, they tried to. Ombra and Anniba each clung to the other’s hand with a punishing grip. Had Anniba been at his full strength they would never have been separated. But his hand was trembling and fever-slick. One of the men gave his shoulder a burning twist, and Anniba had to let Ombra go. Screaming. Terrible screaming. Through the febrile shimmer of the world around him, he saw his sister struggling with the men.

“No!” she shouted, thrashing her bony arms in every direction. “No, no! Not him. Don’t touch him! He’s mine! I won’t let you! He’s mine! He’s mine!”

She hit and bit the men who held her. She raked her sharp fingers across their eyes. One of the men growled, “You little bitch.”

Then they hit her with something. They hit her over and over until she slumped. Anniba had a glimpse of her hair, a long dark ribbon in the white snow.

He must have tried to get up, to help her, to save her, because they hit him too. A single whump on the back of his head. His next impressions were of pain and chaos, arms dragging him, fire hot against his cheek. His own voice, howling like some wild thing. The sky, blinding white. The trees like bars enclosing him.

He dreamt of home and his mother. He dreamt of running his fingers over Dante. The lace tablecloth. The white gloves. A bowl of soup in front of him, and his mother coaxing him to eat. “Open your mouth. Swallow now. You need your strength.”

Two days later—but it may as well have been another time, another age, another epoch of human history, another boy—he woke up, his fever broken. He lay on a fetid animal skin and the man with the bleached-bone face was tending him.

“You see,” the man said, quietly, confidingly, as if telling Anniba a secret he already knew, “we are not savages. We saved your life. And so did she.”

Anniba didn’t understand. “Where is my sister?”

These would be the last words he spoke for almost two years. A moment later he saw the spit over the campfire, and it was very clear where his sister was.

“Hannibal?” says Chilton. “Hannibal, can you hear me?”

Rough wheezes, mucus lodged in his throat. He tries to answer Chilton, but the only sound he can make is fragile and formless, almost a mewl.

“You were in the middle of telling me about waking up in the escaped prisoners’ camp,” Chilton prompts. “Do you remember? You were about to tell me what you saw on the spit above the campfire.”

Hannibal doesn’t respond. Inside his memory palace, he is still gazing down into the open oubliette. The pulsing purity of its darkness is mesmerizing. It seems to be beckoning him. His feet edge forward against his will.

“Hannibal? Hannibal? Open your eyes, please. The soup in your dream—that was real, wasn’t it? The prisoners were feeding you. What was in that soup, Hannibal? Can you tell me?”

The oubliette beckons, beckons.

A hacking sound, loud and viscid. Chilton rears back.

“Ah—he’s choking!”

He looks to the nurses for help, but Barney is there first, a tissue in hand.

In a very soft voice he says, “He’s crying.” Fearlessly Barney mops the tears and snot from Hannibal’s face.

“All right,” says Chilton. He is trying very hard not to look too delighted. “Why don’t we stop there for the night? You did well, Hannibal. Very well.”

Inside the palace Hannibal is right up at the precipitous edge of the oubliette. He has gotten all he needs from it; now he can shut the door. He drops the torch, which flickers out on the floor, and throws himself down on the heavy door, dragging it forward in grinding bursts. It takes all his strength, for a furious force resists his efforts. It tears at his clothes, wrenches at his limbs, seeking to pull him down into the ravenous abyss.

From out of the black depths, a voice cries to him: “Anniba, stop! Anniba, stop! STOP! STOP! STOP!”

He grunts and strains with all his might. The door rolls back into place—the bolts slide, the chains cross—and the voice from below is silenced.

Gornergrat and Barney march him back to his cell, one at each elbow. His legs barely support his weight. When they enter Hannibal’s cell, Gornergrat immediately drops him, but Barney keeps his hold and lowers Hannibal gently onto the bed.

“You need some aspirin?” he asks.

Seeing Hannibal in extremis seems to have melted some of Barney’s reserve.

Hannibal lowers his head, his hair falling over his eyes. “Thank you, Barney, but I’m all right.”

As soon as Barney un-cuffs him, he curls up tightly on his bed, his breaths hitching. He waits for the orderlies’ footsteps to fade away completely. Then he breathes easy. Uncurls, sits up. Rolls the cricks out of his shoulders and neck. From the shelf by his sink he extracts some tissue paper and uses it to dry himself more thoroughly. Back with Chilton he must have truly wept a flood, for even the collar of his jumpsuit is soggy. He strips down to his underclothes, sits back on his bed, and lets out a long, whistling sigh.

Should he feel ashamed of himself for exploiting his memories in such appalling fashion? Ought he now to flagellate himself for so unresistingly ladling up his sob story for Dr. Chilton’s delectation?

No.

Why should he? When all he told Chilton was the wrong version of the truth?

(Although can it even be called the wrong version of the truth when he omitted essential facts, softened the sharp edges of so many happenings, and outright fabricated others? If one slowly mixes falsehoods with the real, when do the scales tip from truth to fiction?)

Of course he takes no pride in exploiting the memory of Mischa for his own gain. But then again, he wasn’t exploiting *Mischa*. The story he told Chilton was about a girl called ‘Ombra,’ a name Hannibal invented on the spot.

If he is being honest with himself, then he admits what he told Chilton was a lie. And lying *does* shame him. He considers lying a last resort, for he judges lies to be the bluntest of instruments, unsubtle and clumsy. Small wonder, then, that Dr. Chilton lapped them up.

So here he is. Hannibal Lecter, at the last resort. Telling fairy tales. Prostituting himself so he might satisfy the curiosity of every behaviorist in the field. Now Chilton believes he knows Hannibal’s secret. His explanation. The theorem that might solve his proof.

More, more, more; we want more; give us more. Has he given enough yet? Will the demands stop? Does he even want them to?

Hannibal shuts his eyes, leans back on his bed.

If only he were allowed to demand something in return. He, too, wants more. So much more. Starting with Wolf Trap. Give him Wolf Trap, then. Just once, give him Wolf Trap in all its glory. A perfect Wolf Trap from start to finish. Hasn’t he at least earned that much?

Into his memory he dives with practiced ease. He flies across the main hall, arcs through the Baroque gallery, shoots up into the dark tower where all his memories of Will are stored. And lo and behold: Wolf Trap is waiting.

And by some mercy, it seems Hannibal has been given his wish. Will’s house is harmony. Everything is accounted for, no detail misplaced. Even the air smells right, like late sunshine

and dust. The old armchair enfolds him comfortably, and he sinks down into it with bliss.

He hears that familiar rumble of approaching automobiles, followed by the excited yammer of the dogs. And then there is Will. Will as he was that day. Will as he always is. Will standing there, alone but for the dogs, his back turned to Hannibal.

Hannibal's eyes mist over with the beauty of it. He never appreciated the perfection of the memory until this moment. What a miracle, its tender balance! How ingenious, its integrity of form! See how Wolf Trap glides forward, as vivid as a waking dream. How could he have ever sought to alter this?

Will steps through the threshold of his little house, and the light within him seems to shiver, blown by the soft breath of Hannibal's intrusion.

"You're inside my house," Will says, and heartbreak cracks his voice in two.

Hannibal looks at him in wonder. Simply grateful to be in his presence, warming himself by Will's light.

The scene progresses with all the graceful inevitability of a symphony's final sonata. Or is it a duet between two powerful instruments, fearfully and faultlessly matched?

Will and Hannibal relocate to the back porch; Hannibal and Will relocate to the kitchen. They orbit one another—that planetary push and pull. Face to face at the table now with eggs between them. Will's plate broken, Hannibal's plate broken. Will brandishes the linoleum knife in Hannibal's face; Hannibal uncovers the bite mark and the knife drops. Will's eyes, wide and molten, two inches from Hannibal's eyes.

Back to the living room. Will stooped in the old armchair, almost at the point of weeping. Hannibal approaches him, trying with soft words and gentle movements to temper his rage. But Will won't be tempered. He leaps to his feet and storms the room, the light within him throbbing liquid bright.

"I didn't come here to kill you," Hannibal tells him. And with this, he surrenders the linoleum knife. It arcs across the room, clanks heavy on the floor. "I came here to take you with me."

Will's face, uncomprehending. "You. Are. Crazy."

"It is the only way you can be free. Free of Jack. Free of your ghosts. Stay behind and you will rot away. I am giving you life, Will. Don't choose death just to spite me."

Will softens ever so slightly. "Where would we go?"

The note of pure curiosity in his voice may be the most beautiful sound Hannibal has ever heard. "Anywhere," he gabbles. "Everywhere."

"Would you make me kill?"

"I wouldn't make you do anything you didn't already want to do."

“Yeah,” says Will, with a smile half acid, half fond. “That’s what you always say.”

The light within him quickens. Hannibal edges nearer…and nearer…

“Come with me,” he says.

Will’s voice becomes a lilt. “You have been so lonely. For so long.”

“So have you.”

“And you think this will help?”

“Yes.”

“And if I say no?”

“It doesn’t bear thinking about.” Hannibal is so close to him now. He can see every pore, every eyelash. He can smell the tears on his cheeks, the faint tang of Baltimore State Hospital disinfectant in his hair.

“Please, Will.” He is so close he need only breathe the words. “Come away with me. Let me save you.”

Faint defiance in Will’s whisper. “You think I need saving?”

“For now you do,”—Hannibal leans in—“but not for long.”

He kisses Will slowly, with grave respect. And Will, after the barest second of hesitation, kisses him back.

Then the dogs start barking.

As always—with great disappointment, but also with the bolstering knowledge that this is the way things have to be—Hannibal breaks the kiss. He draws away from Will and throws a very brief glance at the back door beyond which the dogs are howling. Only a reflex; he can’t see what troubles them.

He knows exactly what sight awaits him when he inevitably looks back Will’s way: the end of role-playing. Will’s real face, still tear-streaked, but his eyes dry and alight with an almost ugly gleam of triumph. The face of the Will who guts him.

Hannibal is prepared to see this face. But when he turns back to look at Will, the Will who stands before him is not the Will he expects to see.

Oh, he looks similar. His tears are drying just as they’re supposed to. And there is certainly a gleam of triumph in his eyes. But it isn’t the *same* gleam. Instead his gaze is slightly unfocused, heavy-lidded, as if Hannibal has caught him in the middle of tabulating some tricky calculation.

Hannibal stares at Will, in interest and in horror, as the dogs keep barking.

Nothing happens. Will doesn't move.

"Will?" Hannibal hazards.

Will looks at him. The full force of his attention is brought to bear on Hannibal, who feels it like a spike driving all the way through him. An instant later, Will lurches forward as if he's lost his balance, and then he's kissing Hannibal again.

It isn't like before. Will isn't reflecting or redirecting. No echo this; no slow kiss of equals. Will's kiss is a pressing question, thoroughly and attentively posed. For a moment Hannibal is powerless to answer it. He can only stand there statue-still, his fingers splayed with shock, as Will laves his tongue across Hannibal's teeth.

A bell tolls inside him: *This is not what happened! This is not what happened!* A warning, but Hannibal chooses not to listen. He is too curious to see what will happen if he opens his mouth and accepts Will in. So he does.

Will presses his whole body against Hannibal's so forcefully Hannibal stumbles back. He can feel Will's arms snaking up his spine, bunching the fabric of his shirt. Will hums into Hannibal's mouth, almost a laugh, and begins kissing him with greater urgency. But he's never rough; Will's every movement remains deliberate, calculated, carefully judged. He kisses the same way Hannibal kills.

Hannibal takes another step back, knocks into Will's piano. Slowly a great pressure is building in his lungs. He fears Will might be trying to suffocate him with his mouth. Braced against the piano, Hannibal pulls away with a hard gasp for breath.

Will is breathing heavily, too. He tugs Hannibal off the piano and pulls roughly at the back of his shirt.

"What are you doing, Will?" Hannibal whispers, voice fizzed with curiosity.

"Isn't that self-evident?" Will untucks Hannibal's shirt and scrabbles at the buttons. "I'm taking off my clothes."

"My clothes."

A huff of amusement from Will. "Pretty sure they're mine. You took them from my house, didn't you? I'm taking them back."

He yanks the shirt down Hannibal's shoulders, the fabric wedging Hannibal's arms behind his back. Will takes advantage of Hannibal's entrapment by kissing him again—his mouth, his jaw, his neck. Then Will's mouth finds the bite mark, and he begins to suck. Hannibal moans.

The screech of fabric as he frees his arms and grabs Will, touches him everywhere he can reach. The force of it spins them around, and then around again—a charitable person might describe this as balletic, but really they're a shade away from toppling over. Hannibal can feel the hard heat of Will against him. The burn of Will's stubble where it rubs his jaw. The taste

of Will's tongue. So real, so very very real. Hannibal digs his fingers into Will's skull as if trying to bore into his brain.

In the hallway now. Will's shirt unbuttoned, gaping open. Hannibal pulls Will off him and looks into his eyes. He sees the dilation of his pupils, and finds himself saying, in what is almost a plea: "What are you doing, Will?"

"I'm—" Will is very out of breath. "I'm—saying—yes."

Hannibal doesn't ask for clarification. Just stares at him and waits.

"I'll go with you. Everywhere. Anywhere. Anywhere but here."

Hannibal can't believe. He caresses the sides of Will's face, cradles it like some precious thing.

"You'll come with me," he says.

"You're right." Even though Will is gasping, his voice conveys the full extent of his bitterness. "About me. You're always right. If I stay I'll rot away. I'll die slowly. I know that. Of course I know that. I'd rather die faster. With you."

And Hannibal drags him in, all but smashing their faces together. They slide down the wall onto the floor. Will rocks his shoulders out of his shirt, rakes his fingers down Hannibal's sides until he reaches his belt buckle.

As Will unfastens him, Hannibal bares his neck, rubs the back of his head against the hard plaster of the hallway wall. He becomes aware of the dogs; they're still barking; in fact, they're barking louder than ever.

"The dogs," he finds himself saying, even as he feels Will's warm hands on him.

"They're fine," says Will, shortly. His teeth nip at the skin beneath Hannibal's navel. "Just hungry. We'll feed them later."

But the barking just keeps getting louder, so loud Hannibal feels as though it is coming from inside him, from inside them both. "Is this—" he shakes his head to clear the haze. "Is this—really you?"

Will looks up. With his shoulders raised, his bare arms braced on either side of Hannibal, he looks panther-like, almost feral.

"Or,"—gasps Hannibal—"is this role-playing?"

Will smiles tightly. "It's always role-playing. I'm playing me. You're playing you."

With this, he takes Hannibal's penis into his mouth and begins to lick. Rough then smooth, rough then smooth, a nip of teeth. The inside of Will's mouth is scorching hot on Hannibal's skin; it reminds him of that moist, emanating heat of Will's fever days, when his body became a blazing furnace of desperation and incipient madness.

Hannibal's voice has turned animal. He hears it from afar: grunts and growls. "There now!" A litany under his breath. "There now! Will…Will, how does it taste?"

Will moans around him in answer.

But the dogs are still barking. Loud enough to crack the sky, to serrate eardrums. The terrible racket shakes the house on its foundations. The dogs are barking because the FBI is coming. But the FBI is no longer coming. It's a feedback loop. The memory is glitching again. Hannibal's eyes fly open.

A spidering crack across the hallway ceiling, growing longer and wider before his eyes. The paintings shake on the walls, the glasses clink in the kitchen cupboards. More cracks spring up everywhere Hannibal looks.

Will doesn't seem aware that his house appears to be collapsing around him. His cheeks hollow as he sucks.

Inside Hannibal the bell is ringing again: *This is not what happened! This is not what happened! This is not what happened!* The crack in the ceiling is turning into a crevasse. Wolf Trap strains to hold itself together.

He has to stop.

Annoyed, Will lets Hannibal's softening flesh fall from him lips. "Problem?"

Hannibal would direct Will's attention to the fissures opening up in every wall of his living room, but he doubts this Will will be able to see them. Instead he says, "We can't do this."

Will's stare turns flat and hard. "Why not?"

"This is not what happened," says Hannibal, even though he knows Will won't understand.

Will's eyebrows draw up, confused, almost hurt. "It's what's happening now."

His expression tugs at something within Hannibal. Wolf Trap may be ruined beyond rescue, but this is still Will. Hannibal runs his fingers gently through Will's curly hair. "I'm sorry. But I can't."

"You've got to be kidding me." Will's face twists. "I thought this is what you wanted."

"But this isn't what you want. This isn't what you chose."

"I just chose it."

Hannibal only smiles sadly. Frames Will's face between his fingers, appreciating this moment even as he knows it must end.

"This isn't who you are," he tells him.

And between Hannibal's hands, Will's expression hardens: his eyebrows drop, his mouth tightens, his eyes turn the color of unwrought iron.

"Well," he says, icily, "stab me enough times with a linoleum knife and I become *someone else*."

Hannibal stares in shock at that face, suddenly a stranger's face, cradled between his hands.

"You remember that?" he whispers.

"Kind of hard to forget."

Hannibal doesn't understand. Will is a memory. A memory cannot *have* a memory.

Something has gone very wrong in Wolf Trap. This is an error, a fatal error. He releases Will; all the while the house rumbles and quakes around them.

"I can't forget. But I can forgive. Kiss me again,"—Will creeps back towards him—"and I'll let bygones be bygones."

A wave of revulsion breaks over Hannibal. This isn't Will. What is this?

He draws away from Will, pulls his pants back up. "This is a memory," he says. "Not a fantasy."

"It's whatever you want it to be."

Hannibal just shakes his head.

Will sits back on his haunches with a groan. "Is this all, then?" He throws up his arms, addresses the cracked ceiling. "Is this it? You can disembowel me however many times you like, but this—this is one step too far for you? Why keep doing this over and over if you've already ruled out the possibility of ever getting what you want?"

"I don't want this," says Hannibal. "I want the real memory. I want *Will*."

"I *am* Will."

And the thing that isn't Will stands up. His chest is heaving, still a little flushed. His voice rises.

"So it's back to the beginning, huh? We're taking the scene from the top? Playing another round of 'Please Pass The Linoleum Knife?'"

Hannibal looks at where it lies on the floor, its tantalizing glint. Will twists around, looks at it, too. But he doesn't go after it.

"Every time," he says, "there's that knife. That fucking linoleum knife. Always the linoleum knife! It hangs over us like the Sword of Damocles. You don't want to go back to that any more than I do. Don't make me, Hannibal."

“I won’t gut you with it,” Hannibal promises. “Never again.”

But Will won’t hear it. “Don’t you see? It doesn’t matter if you gut me or I gut you. It’s the same thing either way. No.” He repeats the word with relish, as if he can’t quite believe he’s saying it. “No. No more. I’m through.”

“You don’t have a choice.”

“I *always* have a choice.”

Will plucks up his shirt, shrugs it on. Slowly Hannibal gets to his feet, watching Will as he paces around the room, grabbing his coat, pulling on his shoes.

“What are you doing, Will?” he asks him.

“I’m getting out of this sideshow. You’re gonna have to do this by yourself from now on.”

“You mustn't do that.” Hannibal stays gentle, but his voice is firm. “There’s nowhere for you to go.”

“There’s a door.” Will gestures vaguely at it. “And whatever lies beyond it.”

But Hannibal is certain that if Will steps out that door, he will be obliterated—it is Wolf Trap that gives him life and form. Without Wolf Trap he is lost.

“This place is your home,” he pleads.

Some of the intensity leaves Will's face. He suddenly looks grim, solemn. “This hasn’t been my home for a long time.”

Then he looks at Hannibal, and the light inside him shines blindingly bright.

“Goodbye, Hannibal,” he says. Then he opens the door and vanishes.

An instant later Hannibal races after him. He throws the door open and peers into the darkness. The driveway is empty, the grass blowing softly in the nighttime breeze that chills his naked chest. But there is no sign of Will. He is gone.

“Will?” Hannibal asks the darkness of his own mind. “Will? Will!?”

There isn’t any answer.

He stands at the threshold of empty Wolf Trap, listening as the dogs keep barking, always barking, warning him of an invasion that will never come.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

I myself am hell.

Chapter Notes

Did you miss me? I know I can only apologize so many times before I have no readers to apologize to! But for those who are still here, I can't thank you enough for your patience. I hope this chapter--the longest yet--will make up for the very drawn-out wait.

It's been so long since I've updated this story that I feel it necessary to suggest some refreshers. If you're at all hazy on prior events, please read the final scene from Chapter 8. And since this chapter draws right up alongside No Name Key (the epilogue of He Who Pours Out Vengeance) I recommend reading that one, too. But if that's too much reading -- and I understand if it is, I've just given you about 25,000 words of homework -- then at least feast your eyes on The Letter.

Wolf Trap again and the dogs are barking. The dogs always bark now in Wolf Trap. Their cacophony presses in on the old armchair from every direction. For how long Hannibal sits there he never knows; he can’t keep track. There are no temporal signposts to guide him anymore. The sun never sets. The FBI vehicles never roll up the driveway. Will never steps through the front door. The only sign of life is the barking, the barking, always the barking, pulsing in his temples like a new heartbeat. On one occasion he stalks to the back of the house, linoleum knife in hand, with the intention of silencing the animals forever. But when he steps through the backdoor, the porch is empty. Yet the dogs bark on.

It used to be such a comfort to him, the thought of Wolf Trap still happening. He assumed Wolf Trap could always happen within the theater of his mind. But Wolf Trap can never happen again.

In the outer world Hannibal tries with his Conté crayons to capture Will's tear-streaked likeness, his white-knuckled fists, the glint of the linoleum knife, but this only results in drawing paper torn to fragments. The images are gone. Wolf Trap is only words to him now, a dry recitation of actions and counteractions: the things he did to Will, the things Will did to him, the things they did together. Nothing but a story, and one that might have happened to somebody else.

Of course Hannibal can never truly forget Wolf Trap. For a brutal reminder he need only look down at his belly. But even the wound is fading, the tissue healing, the slash of angry red growing less angry by the day. It still aches sometimes, a phantom pain.

He spends his nights lying sleepless on his cot, tracing the scar with his fingertips as if it is a message left in braille: *I happened*.

His nightly habits don't go unnoticed. One morning Gornergrat, who doesn't usually do pharmaceutical rounds, makes an exception. The wheels of his medicine cart squeal to a stop in front of Hannibal's cell.

"I don't ask much." Gornergrat ticks off demands on his fingers. "You keep your space neat, you keep yourself quiet, you eat three meals a day, you sleep eight hours a night." Four fingers up, a mocking salute. "This too much for you, buddy?"

The head orderly often strikes this note between drill sergeant and kindergarten schoolmaster. The condescension is anathema to Hannibal, especially at present. His sleepless nights have left him weary, and he can feel the slow loosening of the steel coils that bind his violence.

"I apologize, Mr. Gornergrat," he says, perfectly polite, although his eyes are on the coffee he's stirring a little too vigorously. "I conform to your schedule as much as I am able, but I don't need eight hours of sleep."

"You need what the doctors say you need. Do you know what happens if you can't get eight hours of sleep on a nightly basis?"

"I will be prescribed a sedative. I'm well aware."

Hannibal is indifferent to this conversation; he is too busying savoring the taste of his coffee. Dark-roasted Sumatran beans, freshly ground and brewed on the Moccamaster in Dr. Chilton's office. Gornergrat eyes the coffee blackly. Hannibal's morning cup is a great deal more aromatic than the watery swill sitting on the hot plate in the orderlies' station.

"You know, Lecter, I have a name for inmates like you." Gornergrat spits it out: "HFP. Stands for 'high-functioning patient.' HFPs think they know something about living in a place like this. But just because they're experts outside the cage doesn't mean they're experts inside it. In my experience it's HFPs who are the least prepared for life down here. Can't tolerate the boredom, see. Lack of stimulation gets to 'em real quick. And when it does, those fine minds of theirs start breaking down. They stop sleeping—that's always the first sign, the sleeping. Then they stop eating, they stop talking, they stop cleaning up after themselves, they stop doing pretty much everything. Slippery slope, Doctor. One night you're not sleeping. The next thing you know, there's a quart of liquid shit in your incontinence briefs."

Hannibal tables his coffee with a sigh. This conversation has become unsuitable for breakfast. “Now don’t fetch the diaper yet, Mr. Gornergrat. As you can see, I don’t lack for stimulation in here.”

And with sulky obedience Gornergrat examines the cell: the padded walls papered with sketches and pages torn from art journals, the neat stacks of soft-covered books on the desk and underneath Hannibal’s cot, the morning New York Times on his breakfast tray, the repaired toilet with its silent tank, Hannibal’s preferred brands of moisturizer and aftershave on the sink, the Egyptian cotton sheets on his mattress. Over his hospital-issued undergarments Hannibal is wearing a terrycloth robe and slippers. His personality is apparent in every fastidious detail. His cell has become his micro-kingdom.

Gornergrat takes all of this in and his eyes narrow. “Well, it can’t be stimulating enough. Otherwise you’d be sleeping.”

And the wheels on the medicine cart give a parting shriek as the orderly continues on his rounds.

All the evidence suggests Hannibal’s situation is improving. His weight is up, his strength returned. On account of his twice-weekly walks in the hospital courtyard, he has a little color. Dr. Chilton grants him almost any privilege he might name: a glass of Viognier with his dinner, an afternoon plinking away on a decrepit rental harpsichord, a carefully monitored visit from a salon artist. This haircut is not up to Hannibal’s standards, but at least now when he looks in the mirror he can recognize himself.

As Barney holds the mirror just beyond his handcuffed reach, Hannibal peers into his own eyes and is transfixed by the pain he sees reflected there. It’s not the glancing pain of old, the never satiated hunger, but a pain sharp and urgent, begging to be voiced. He has often seen, and appreciated, pain like this in the eyes of other people, but it never occurred to him he might one day see it in his own.

Hannibal forgets to thank the hairstylist for his work.

He starts composing letters. Long letters, artful letters, some as charming as the letters he used to write to his acquaintances on the Arts Council and the Symphony Board. Others are screeds of rage and spite. He never goes so far as to set any of these words on paper. How unwise that would be, when all these words are wrong.

Barking, barking, barking in the hollow house inside his mind.

Less than a month until his trial, and Hannibal hears the opening chords that precede the curtain's rise. In the Coffee Room he now conducts almost daily consultations with his new lawyer. Under normal circumstances Leonard Brauer would probably end up as a selection of spreadable meats on Hannibal's table. He is the very image of the cutthroat defense attorney: an ambulance chaser with no manners, a cold-blooded cleverness, and an unquenchable thirst for attention. Brauer wields his words the same way a juggler handles knives, flamboyant but always aware of their potential to cut.

"You hired me as your counsel, Dr. Lecter, so you better start taking some. Either let Dr. Chilton here testify on your behalf, or it's off to Supermax, where Hannibal the Cannibal is gonna get very well-acquainted with Chester the Molester. Got me?"

The fluorescents catch on Brauer's teeth, a predatory spark.

Hannibal straightens in his chair until his handcuffs clink the table brace. "I don't object to Dr. Chilton testifying on my behalf." And he nods at Chilton, who is sitting next to Brauer with his notes brandished on his clipboard. "I'm grateful for his help. It is the content of his testimony I object to."

"Now Hannibal," says Chilton, professionally petulant, "you've already given me permission to discuss your memories."

"To discuss them in your article," says Hannibal—and Chilton relaxes, pacified for the moment. "Not to use them as my legal defense. Any information I gave you while under the influence of amobarbital is highly colored, if not wholly suspect. The transcript of our interview won't be admissible in court."

"He isn't going to read from the transcript," says Brauer, clicking his tongue impatiently.

"I certainly won't." Chilton draws himself up. "I'll give the judge my diagnosis of your psychopathological condition, the sum result of the information I've gleaned from our interviews."

"Including the narcoanalytic interview."

Chilton's nostrils flair. Brauer, sensing trouble, attempts diplomacy.

"Dr. Lecter, if it's the amobarbital that's the problem here, then the solution is simple: just tell Dr. Chilton your Poor Little Orphan story during a session when you're not all hopped up on narcotics."

Hannibal raises his chin innocently. "How am I to tell Dr. Chilton a story I can't consciously remember?"

A dark twinkle in Brauer's eye. "You'll *remember* if you read the *transcript*."

Hannibal appreciates the unscrupulousness of this suggestion even though it runs counter to his aims.

“My early life,” he says slowly and firmly, transferring his penetrating stare from Brauer to Chilton and back, “had no bearing on my state of mind when I committed the murders I’m accused of. It sheds no light on the question of whether I understand the consequences of my actions, and it can neither prove nor disprove my competency to stand trial. I apologize for my vehemence, gentlemen,”—for he sees, and is amused by, Chilton and Brauer’s mutual frustration—“but the information divulged in the narcoanalytic interview is irrelevant to my defense.”

Chilton heaves an operatic sigh. “Hannibal, when you were a child you underwent a *Traumatic Cannibalistic Experience*. Of course it’s relevant!”

‘Traumatic Cannibalistic Experience’ taxes Hannibal’s ability to remain impassive. “With all due respect, Doctor,” he says, “I fail to see how.”

Now Dr. Chilton leans forward in his seat, tents his fingertips, and launches into his well-rehearsed Charlie Rose interviewee mode: “Isn’t it obvious? With every murder you committed you were revisiting your sister’s death. Reliving the trauma of that devastating experience, except instead of the gulag escapees being in control of the situation, you were. And whenever you consumed the flesh of your victims, you were re-enacting the horror of consuming your own sister. Converting the pain of that terrible memory into a pleasurable feeling, something to savor and, ah, digest. Cannibalism became your chosen coping mechanism. You are driven to kill by subconscious impulses beyond your control, and these subconscious impulses have dominated your psyche ever since your”—he hammers his palm for emphasis—“Traumatic Cannibalistic Experience. You may be a murderer, Hannibal, but first and foremost you are a victim.”

While listening to this speech, Hannibal finds it very easy to appear long-suffering and put upon, although he can’t stop the skin around his mouth from creasing in contempt.

Brauer is stroking his chin. “Not too shabby,” he says. “Play this right, it should score some sympathy points with the judge.”

“I have no interest in sympathy,” sniffs Hannibal.

Brauer eyes him. “Then you’d better start faking one. Might be the difference between life and death.” He leaves his seat and begins pacing deliberately, voice taking on the cool smoothness of a man accustomed to declamation. “Look, I’m the only person in this room who isn’t trained in psychiatry, and even I can tell you’re swimming in some seriously deep denial. The good news is if I do my job right then you’re gonna have many, many years to work through all these issues with the good Dr. Chilton.” Now Brauer circles in on Hannibal, closer and closer. “So help me do my job right. Help Dr. Chilton do his job right. Let him convince the judge that your murders, your dinner parties, and all your other extracurricular activities were the work of a man in thrall to his darkest urges, a man who can’t modify his behavior or take responsibility for his actions, because he is suffering from a serious post-traumatic stress disorder that distorts the way he thinks.”

He can feel Brauer breathing on the back of his neck. Brave man. Hannibal keeps his eyes on his hands, the skin there still so pale it looks almost translucent. Thankfully the skin of his

face is thicker. He doesn't want Brauer to see the faintest glimmer of the authentic emotions inside him.

"I'm sorry," he says, with the quiet dignity of a practiced martyr. "But I insist on defending myself in my own way."

Chilton rolls his eyes.

Brauer groans at the ceiling. "And what way is that?"

Hannibal's gaze unfocuses. "Is there any word on whether Will Graham will testify?"

This apparent non sequitur disarms both Brauer and Chilton. Brauer answers first. "It's no secret the Attorney General wants him badly. Graham would be the prosecution's star witness if they can get him."

"If?" prompts Hannibal.

Brauer shrugs. "He hasn't been on any witness list I've seen. Jack Crawford's doing, I'm told."

"Jack insists Will is too traumatized to appear in court." Dr. Chilton is trying not to sound gleeful. "Or, ah, so goes the rumor."

"Will Graham going M.I.A. is the best news we could hope for." Brauer frames the scene with his hands. "Just picture it: wildly articulate profiler with the face of an angel endures censure, a serious illness, eight months in an asylum, and still has the cojones to face down his tormenter in a courtroom and tell the world his story? That'd go over like gangbusters. I'd shake Graham's hand if I could find it. He's doing us a big favor, staying curled up in his hole."

"He might be compelled to testify."

"Sure, the prosecution could subpoena him, though they'd be risking pissing off Crawford in the—wait." Brauer squints hard at Hannibal. "Are you… *disappointed*? Oh no, Dr. Lecter. No, no, no. Your priorities need a full-body readjustment stat. Read my lips: your court date is not an opportunity to hook up with your ex-boyfriend. We need the odds stacked in your favor as much as possible, which means Will Graham has to stay far, far away from Baltimore."

Hannibal's face is stone.

Brauer exchanges a silent look with Chilton, acknowledging how much work they have cut out for them. "You know," the lawyer says, turning back to Hannibal, "maybe I was wrong about you. Between this and you being bosom buddies with Freddie Lounds, I'm beginning to think you aren't competent to stand trial after all."

"I have my reasons for speaking to Freddie Lounds."

“Speaking to Freddie Lounds,” Brauer enunciates every word, “makes you look like a *fame whore*.”

This elicits a minuscule wince from Hannibal.

Even Chilton takes offense. “Freddie Lounds has been doing right by Hannibal so far. Her articles have made him a popular man.”

Brauer shakes his head. “Popular one day, pariah the next. Public opinion is not where we go looking for a fair trial. Freddie Lounds may be playing along with Dr. Lecter for now, but chances are she’s only trying to give him enough rope to hang himself with.”

“Then she is going to need an *awful* lot of rope,” says Hannibal, cheerfully.

When Freddie next comes to visit him, she has in hand a white paper bag that emanates a richly spiced tang.

“North African for your dinner?” he asks.

The accuracy stops her short. “Eggplant tagine,” she says. “From a little restaurant I like. They do the most fantastic vegetarian food.”

“Ah yes.” He smiles thinly. “How surprised I was to discover your dietary preference.”

“Not as surprised as I was to discover yours.” Freddie approaches the glass. “I’ve never been so grateful to be a vegetarian. I dodged a bullet the night I dined at your table.”

Hannibal keeps his face diligently blank, knowing Freddie would not appreciate being set right on this score.

She gives the paper bag a shake. “This isn’t for me.”

He goes blanker still, genuinely taken aback. “You’ve brought me dinner?”

Even Freddie, with her ostentatiously hardened carapace, can’t resist a grin at his reaction. “Least I can do for a fellow vegetarian. I know what it’s like being stuck with set meal after set meal of roasted vegetables and soggy Portobello sandwiches. Can’t risk you starving to death before your trial.”

Hannibal watches her unpack the plastic container into the food slot and feels his lips curl of their own accord. It isn’t only Freddie’s gift that pleases him; it is its resemblance to another such gift. The players are different, the action the same. He wonders if Freddie is as unaware of this connection as she seems.

“Won’t you be joining me?” he asks as he pulls the container through.

She shakes her head. “Already eaten.”

A twinge of disappointment. It has been so long since Hannibal shared a meal with anybody interesting. He considers his options: rude of him to eat in front of Freddie, who is watching him expectantly, but she committed the initial rudeness in avoiding breaking bread with him.

Even when sealed, the tagine smells of freedom. He opens it. Takes a slow bite. A plump apricot discharges its sweetness on his tongue.

“This is excellent,” he says, after swallowing. “But it would be more satisfying with meat.”

“We’ll have to agree to disagree on that.” She sounds almost fond. “How much longer will we have vegetarianism in common?”

“I have an appointment with a gastroenterologist next week.”

“You’re counting the days, I imagine.”

“I look forward to eating meat again,” he says, dabbing his lips. “Although my anticipation is tempered by the hospital staff’s unfortunate habit of overcooking everything that passes through their kitchen.”

“And the meat they serve here isn’t exactly your choice cut.”

A gleam in his eye as he gestures with his fork. “Why have you brought me this?”

“Friendly gesture.”

“Are we friends?”

“I wouldn’t know.”

Her answer doesn’t surprise him. “Friendship is an unfamiliar concept to you.”

“Another thing we have in common.”

“I understand friendship.”

“Beg to differ,” she says, eyes hard.

He ruminates, rolling his tongue across his teeth. Then, with strategic breeziness, he asks: “What would you say if I were to tell you my lawyer has advised me to stop seeing you?”

She tosses her head, apparently unconcerned. “I’d say you have a good lawyer. Speaking to the media gives the impression you’re trying to influence the outcome of your trial.”

“Can’t have that,” he says, lightly.

“Are you taking your lawyer’s advice to heart?”

“Yes.” He pauses for a moment, relishing her lightning flash of panic. “The interview you often mention. I’m now prepared to give it to you.”

Whiplashed, she can only blink at him.

“An exclusive sit-down with Hannibal Lecter,” he continues, suppressing his smile. “With photographs, video, whatever accompaniments you think appropriate.”

“Why now?” Her stare angles and sharpens, a crowbar to pry off his mask. “What’s changed for you?”

“My trial approaches.” He gives an elegant shrug. “*Les jeux sont faits*.”

Freddie stares and stares. He lets her look, knowing she can see him clearer than almost anyone—but she still perceives only the shape of him, not the essence. He expects it, knows he ought to like it better that way, even though it fails to satisfy him on an elemental level.

Freddie sees whatever she sees in him. Her smile is one of grim anticipation. “Something tells me,” she says, “the games have only just begun.”

You told me once that reflections make for poor companions. The accuracy of your observations has often pierced me to the quick, but this particular utterance, it grieves me to say, fell short of your mark. Reflections are the finest companions we could wish for. Where else can we expect to see ourselves reflected but in the faces of our trusted confidantes? What are friends for, if not to keep us honest? Our mirrors remind us of who we are and who we wish to be. I always took great satisfaction in knowing I had you as my mirror.

Mirror, mirror, where have you gone? Across the distance I project my gaze, so that in the clear water of your eyes I might see myself again. But the world outside me is a subfusc surface, and in it I cast no reflection.

The dogs are barking, barking, barking, barking.

When Chilton arrives for their next session, Hannibal is already sitting at his desk, hands folded oh so casually over his crossed knees. His face is as smooth as if it were painted onto him. He announces, by way of greeting: “I wish to ask a favor.”

Chilton raises his eyebrows. He is used to formalities, inquiries about his health and the progress of his article, the polite prattle Hannibal usually insists upon before his therapy begins. “By all means,” the hospital director says, lowering himself into a folding chair. “Always happy to keep you happy, Hannibal.”

A long pause, a knot slowly tying and untying itself.

Finally Hannibal says: “I am considering writing a letter.”

Chilton takes this in, fractionally. “You have internet access. Felt-tip pens, paper, and enough correspondence that I have had to hire a second secretary for the exclusive sorting of your mail. Write as many letters as you’d like.”

“This particular letter I don’t want read by anyone who isn’t its intended recipient.”

This piques Chilton’s interest. “And who is this ‘intended recipient’?”

“Will Graham.”

Silence. Then, in a voice shivering with curiosity, Chilton asks, “Why now?”

Hannibal takes a slow soundless breath. He doesn’t answer.

“You realize,” Chilton continues, “that you contacting Will after all this time might be perceived, ah, *by some*, as witness tampering?”

“But Will Graham won’t be standing as a witness at my trial.”

“He can still change his mind about that.”

Hannibal tilts his head, python-like. “He can.” Then, “As my psychiatrist, I’m sure you recognize the therapeutic benefits I might reap from writing to Will.”

Chilton taps his smile with a finger. “A letter *could* provide a sense of closure. For both of you.”

“But it must be private. Otherwise I will find it impossible to express myself with total honesty.

“Of course,” Chilton says, far too quickly. “I can set up measures here so that no one interferes. Your letter will be for Will’s eyes only. You have my word on that.”

It’s just as Hannibal thought: Chilton won’t only read the letter; its contents will surely become the discussion topic of their next session and of Chilton’s next journal article. Then there is the FBI to consider. The letter will have to be inspected, swabbed for contaminants, x-rayed—and undoubtedly Jack Crawford will scrutinize every word. Chilton may even attempt to leverage the letter for information, or simply for the enjoyment of holding power over Jack. A vulgar prospect.

What to do? Hannibal could pass the letter through Freddie instead, but this course of action has its own drawbacks. Certainly Freddie will have no compunction about reading the letter, and as she has already admitted to having no knowledge of Will’s whereabouts, she will inevitably hand the letter over to Jack. She, too, might attempt to bargain with it. Knowing Freddie Lounds, she will probably threaten to publish it.

Hannibal requests a private conversation and receives instead a spectacle. How little this discourages him.

He ends his vigil in Wolf Trap. It served no purpose; for no matter how long he waits and waits, a ruin cannot reconstitute itself. What's past is perished.

Instead he finds solace in other memories: from his foundational years in Paris, from his rootless years of travel, from his first years in the States when he comported himself a touch too rashly, from the years of his psychiatric practice when he was at his height. He treats this last with care, stepping into his Rembrandts with slippered caution, not a dust mite disturbed as he adheres with unforgiving exactitude to the mnemonic record. Every memory of Will, even the most innocuous, he forbids himself from successively replaying for fear that what happened in Wolf Trap might happen elsewhere.

He has never before had cause to put the palace under such stringent constraints. It takes its toll. His memories, particularly those concerning Will, experience a peculiar reduction in their vibrancy, as if they have been leached of the light and color that gives them life.

Sitting in his office of old, the distance between the two leather chairs has never felt so vast, and Will's face, almost swallowed by the shadows, is the sepulchral face of a ghost.

"Do you feel alive, Will?"

"I feel like I'm fading."

Oh mirror, my mirror, where have you gone? Why do I experience this separation as agony? To be denied a thing we enjoy is mere inconvenience. The only true calamity is to be denied a thing we need. And we don't need our mirrors.

I fear you were mistaken, Monte Cristo. You were never my mirror. I am yours. Your dedicated looking glass. The empty frame that craves your image. The darkened pane thirsting for your light. I ache only to show you yourself again. But what do you ache for? Do you search the surface of every glass and pool? Do you search at all? Or are you easy now, free from your reflection?

I can never be free. What use has a mirror with nothing to reflect?

The 'exclusive sit-down' is anything but an intimate affair. Freddie brings with her a photographer, a videographer, and an assistant juggling coffee orders. Both Chilton and Brauer hover beyond the tripods and light stands. Chilton, clad in his flashiest suit, preens at the attention even when it isn't directed at him, but Brauer is stern. Freddie has refused to provide him with the list of questions she plans to ask, and Hannibal in turn has declined to rehearse his answers.

“Tread carefully, Miss Lounds,” Brauer says, in the distinct grumble of a man who knows no one is listening to him.

“Oh,” Freddie all but croons, “I always do.”

The presence of so many young women stimulates the inmates: they pound on the glass, hoot and catcall; two of them disrobe. Barney and Gornergrat shuttle from cell to cell, calming them down, covering them up. Meanwhile Abel Gideon, fully dressed, watches the proceedings with an idle smirk.

“At long last,” he says, catching Hannibal’s eye. “Fame!”

The photographer redirects one of the lights, trying to reduce its glare on the glass wall that separates Hannibal from his visitors. “Should have done this in the therapy room,” she mutters, with a dark look at the cavorting patients.

“It doesn’t paint the full picture,” Freddie says, blithely, as she applies more lipstick. “Can’t show the lion without his cage.”

At the videographer’s request, Freddie moves her chair an inch closer to the glass wall. Hannibal is asked by the photographer to smooth down a strand of his hair.

When all is set and ready, he can barely see Freddie; the false daylight blasting at him diminishes her to a curly-topped silhouette.

“So,” she says, spreading her hands, “here we are. Finally.”

He returns her smile. The shutter clicks.

“As you know, I’ve been waiting a long time for the opportunity to have this conversation.”

“So have I,” he says.

“If that’s the case, then why haven’t you granted me an interview before now?”

“Knowledge is dangerous. We can only learn so much and live.” He lowers one of his eyelids at Freddie’s assistant, lets her interpret it as a wink. “I’ve wanted to tell you everything. My entire story. But there are other parties involved, and their wishes have to be respected.”

“An attitude I’m sure your lawyer appreciates,” says Freddie.

Indeed Brauer looks a shade appeased.

Hannibal nods slowly. “My lawyer is one of the people with fingers in the pie.”

Freddie catches on with admirable speed. “So someone other than your lawyer has been pressuring you not to talk to me?”

Rather than reply, he says, “I would like to clarify a story you published on your website.”

She raises her eyebrows. “Clarify away.”

“The article was about the profiler Will Graham. You implied he was an accomplice to my alleged crimes, and that on the night of my capture I took refuge in his house because I expected him to help me elude the FBI.”

“But that’s not the case?” Freddie asks, skeptical.

“No. I thought I could force Will to help me. But I misjudged him. Not only was he insusceptible to my influence, he also predicted my actions with such accuracy that I may as well have slapped myself in handcuffs the second I stepped through his door.”

“And how exactly did he do that? Predict you with ‘such accuracy?’”

Lizardly he cants his head. “If I knew the answer to that, then my present circumstances would be very different.”

She appraises him with cool eyes. “You evaded detection for so many years. No one at the FBI had ever come close to catching you.”

“They came too close.”

She acknowledges the correction with a nod. “Miriam Lass. The trainee. She discovered you, so you killed her.”

With a quick glance at Brauer, Hannibal adds, “Allegedly.”

“But Will Graham discovered you, too,” says Freddie, insinuatingly. “And you didn’t kill him.”

“Will is exceptional in more ways than one.” He heads her off. “Will was, at one time, my friend—but he was never my accomplice. He wasn’t involved in anything that might be construed as conspiracy or wrongdoing. He is an innocent man unjustly maligned both by those closest to him, and by the world at large.”

Freddie, of course, is not so easily persuaded. “Just because Will wasn’t directly involved in your crimes, that doesn’t make him blameless. He could still be an accessory. For example, in Dr. Alana Bloom’s death—”

But Hannibal draws the line at offering up Alana’s death for public consumption. “I am sorry to interrupt you,” he says, “but Will was a witness to Dr. Bloom’s death, not an accessory. I can’t emphasize this enough: Will Graham bears no responsibility for what happened to any of my alleged victims. Quite the opposite; Will labored under terrible circumstances to tell the world the truth about me. They bound him, they gagged him, yet still he didn’t stop fighting until his voice was heard. If you are looking for my accomplices, look no further than the many highly placed, highly trained people who wouldn’t listen to Will Graham, and who endeavored to silence him rather than admit they might have made a mistake.”

Silence. The videographer is staring at him with her mouth hanging open.

"*You're* the one who framed Will Graham for those murders," says Freddie. "*You* created the circumstances that prevented him from being heard."

He smiles. "I'm not God, Freddie. I don't create in a vacuum. I work with the materials at hand, and in the case of Will Graham, my work was already laid out for me. Were I one of your readers—and I am—I would question the ease with which I was able to frame Will Graham. I'd question the length of time for which I was able to sustain my charade. Behavioral science declares men like me to be loners by nature and necessity, but the truth is, I don't commit my crimes alone."

"Your alleged crimes," adds Freddie, slyly.

Again and again Hannibal works Will into the conversation, and again and again he proclaims Will's innocence, Will's bravery, Will's praiseworthiness. Every time he upholds Will as far beyond reproach, Freddie looks less convinced.

"Much as I enjoy hearing Will Graham's good qualities enumerated, I think it's time to change the subject." A bite in her voice. "Why don't we talk about the cannibalism."

He inclines his head.

She wastes no time. "Have you ever eaten a human being?"

Brauer interrupts, not for the first time. "Come on, Miss Lounds. Save at least some of the work for the judge."

Freddie doesn't even blink. Instead she asks Hannibal, "Were you to eat someone, hypothetically speaking, how exactly would you go about choosing that person?"

He considers it. "Whenever feasible, hypothetically speaking, one should always try to eat the rude."

"The rude." Her mouth quirks. "A broad classification."

"The discourteous. The gauche. The banal."

"All appearances to the contrary, I do know what the word 'rude' means. So the woman who elbows you on the street and then expects you to apologize, she's lunch? The neighbor who lets her dog do his business on your lawn, she's dinner? The driver who cuts you off on the highway, is he your midnight snack?"

Hannibal smiles faintly.

"Seems kind of petty, don't you think?"

He smiles wider. "Perhaps to you it does. But I have always considered the manner in which we treat others to be a reflection of ourselves, our true natures, our very humanity."

Freddie's eyes narrow as she goes in for the kill. "And what does it say about your true nature, your very humanity, that you torture, murder, and consume the people who offend

you?”

“Aaah!” Brauer makes a slashing motion with his fingers.

But Hannibal answers. “I have very high standards.”

Freddie won’t back down. “And you don’t see that as hypocrisy?”

He looks at her placidly, a glimmer of delight in his eyes. “You profess to despise the killers you write about, but you still pursue them with single-minded interest. You chronicle their every act in exquisite detail, glorify their crimes until they are not only household names, but also heroes of a sort. Tell me, Freddie,”—and he tilts his head, allowing the photographer to get a better angle—“do you see *that* as hypocrisy?"

Freddie declares herself satisfied, her team disassemble their gear, and after handshakes are exchanged and farewells spoken Brauer strolls up to the glass, a grin spreading thick across his face.

“Ok, ok, I gotta admit that was masterful.”

Hannibal accepts this with a graceful smile.

Brauer chuckles to himself. “All this time I’ve been looking at you and seeing only hatchet-faced Nosferatu, but when you turn on the charm, you become George Clooney of the Baltics.” And then to Chilton, with a note of disbelief in his voice, “He was funny, he was personable, he was never rattled, he controlled the conversation start to finish and he didn’t admit to anything that the prosecution doesn’t already have evidence enough to prove. Somehow he managed to implicate absolutely everyone in his crimes—everyone *except* himself. I’m speechless! I feel like I should be taking notes. You ever go to law school?”

“No,” says Hannibal, “but I have eaten my share of lawyers.”

Brauer’s pleased grin falters.

The witching hour. Hannibal walks the somnolent hallways of the hospital. His stride is confident, but inside his chest there beats a drum of purest need. The bite on his face aches in time with it. Down the stairs he glides, avoiding the cameras and the orderlies, until he reaches the sub-basement, where he uses the stolen security pass to unlatch the outer door. The row of cells revealed to him is darkened, unstaffed, but the inmates are bickering loudly. When they see him, they stop. They stare. They genuflect.

One by one he passes them until he reaches the cell he’s searching for. He looks through the glass at the figure on the padded floor, limned as if by a spotlight, sitting head bowed with its back to him. The straitjacket’s tightly knotted laces remind him of exposed vertebrae.

Looking at it, Hannibal experiences a surge of overwhelming emotion. Excitement? Trepidation? Pity? No, it's something wholly else, something unnamable.

"Will," he whispers.

The figure raises its head. Hannibal can see the straps of the mouth guard twisted in Will's hair. He stares into the back of Will's skull, as if with the honed edge of his vision he might cut all the way through to the other side.

"Will.... won't you show me your face?"

Will doesn't respond. Hannibal feels his heart playing out its erratic rhythm on the keys of his ribcage. He tries again. "Let me look at you."

But Will won't move. He won't reveal anything to Hannibal other than the back of his straitjacket and his curling hair, the nape of his neck and the pink soles of his feet.

Appearing on Hannibal's tongue, the magic words:

"*Quid pro quo*, then. Show me your face, and I will show you mine."

The words unlock Will, and like a clockwork toy given sudden life he turns in increments, so that first Hannibal can see only his tensed shoulders, then his arms buckled across his chest, and finally, his face—

The face behind the mask is not Will's. The bones shaping it are the same, the eyes are the same, the same lips, the curl of the nostrils, the mottling of the beard—but the sum total of all these attributes taken together is not Will, it's just not Will.

Hannibal's mouth falls open. With one hand unconsciously pressed to the glass, he tries to reconstitute that face so dear to him, that face he ought to know, and cold sweat rills between his shoulder blades as the stranger shambles to its feet, begins stalking towards the glass, closer and closer and closer.

Hot breath on the side of his neck. A grave-rattle voice insinuates itself directly into his ear: "SEE? SEE?"

He wakes. His sticky body, spasming with horror, is an alien thing. His fists clutch the mattress as if someone is attempting to wrench him off it.

Creakily he sits up. Listens to the frenzied sounds of his own breathing. Marvels at it for a moment, then stills himself.

A dream. Only a dream. He doesn't dream much—doesn't sleep enough to dream—but with his memory palace in disarray it is not surprising that this salvo from his subconscious should have torn through.

He sees again, suspended in the heavy darkness of his cell, the afterburned image of the not-quite-familiar face, grotesque and blank-eyed behind its mask. Not Will. But when he tries for the sake of comparison to recall Will's true face, he finds himself incapable.

In one smooth, mechanical motion he rises from the bed. Heedless of Gornergrat's insistence on the charade of sleep, Hannibal switches on his reading lamp and sits with his elbows on the desk, his wet palms cradling his forehead, his nose taking in deep breaths of disinfected air that scour the roots of his lungs. He both wants—and doesn't want—to do this. But do it he must. He readies a pen.

On to four thick sheets of hospital stationary he pours out words. He doesn't pause to consider them; they flow as if pre-scripted, although this particular composition is not one of his earlier mental efforts. It bears resemblance to all of them—steals phrases from them here and there—but it lacks their essential sincerity and tenderness. He can't indulge in either, not when so many eyes are watching. Duplicity safeguards him; it safeguards Will also.

There are other advantages to duplicity. If he can lie with enough force, enough conviction, then the lie becomes truth.

I don't have to see you to see you, he writes, and signs his name.

The next morning he is washed and dressed and exercised, his nails trimmed, his hair combed back from his scrubbed face, and it is as if the night terror never happened. The only telltale is the envelope, addressed but unsealed, sitting neatly innocuous on the corner of his desk. As he answers other correspondence he spares it the occasional glance. At one point, bowing to temptation, he pets it with his little finger. Paper Will might touch.

He hears footsteps beyond the outer gate; two sets. He doesn't look up from his writing.

"Isn't this a surprise?" he says, without surprise. "Hello, Jack."

Jack and Dr. Chilton proceed purposefully down the corridor. If Jack is unnerved that Hannibal has ascertained his identity without looking, he doesn't show it. His voice is nuclear winter as he says: "Hello, Dr. Lecter."

"Long time, no see." Hannibal angles himself in his chair to face his visitors, amiable smile on his face. "How have you been?"

Jack steps right up to the glass wall. Wordlessly they examine each other. Jack sees Hannibal has been almost entirely restored to his former glory. Hannibal sees Jack has lost another five pounds, and that the hair above his brow has grayed.

Jack transfers his attention to Hannibal's cell. Stares in horror at the proliferation of luxuries inside it.

"What is this," he says to Chilton, "the Ritz-Carlton? Why does he have an *iPad*?"

Chilton only chuckles. "His activity is closely monitored. It's perfectly safe, I assure you. "

"It isn't safe, Doctor. Not perfectly."

“Hannibal and I have an understanding. He has been very cooperative with his therapy, the model of good behavior. It won’t do any harm if he’s allowed a taste of home.” And at Jack’s look, “A *piece* of home. A piece.”

“He’s got a lot of pieces in there. Some of them look sharp.”

Chilton is getting annoyed. “As I’ve said, we have him closely monitored.”

“Dr. Chilton balances the opposing demands of safety and comfort with admirable dexterity,” adds Hannibal.

“You certainly look comfortable.” Jack’s lids are lowered, as if he can’t even bear to look at Hannibal directly. He raises both hands in aggressive inquiry. “So. I’m here. What do you want?”

Hannibal feigns confusion. “I don’t recall summoning you.”

Jack is not amused. “You tore into Beverly Katz when I sent her here on my behalf. Now you’re shooting off your mouth to Freddie Lounds. Clearly you’re trying to get my attention. Well, congratulations: you have it.”

Hannibal’s bemused smile slowly fades. “I wasn’t trying to get *your* attention, Jack.”

Raw anger, like a formerly dozing predator, stirs itself beneath Jack’s skin. “Now you and I both know Will Graham doesn’t read TattleCrime. You can smear him publicly from now till Judgment Day and it’s never going to get back to him. I’m making sure of that.”

“Then it shouldn’t matter what I say to TattleCrime.” Hannibal flaunts his iPad Jack’s way. On the screen, his own calm face, with the banner headline: STEP INSIDE THE MIND OF ‘CANNIBAL’ LECTER. “Have you read the interview?” he asks. “Say what you will about Freddie Lounds, she knows how to handle her pen. I think I come off very well. Not as well as Will, of course. And why should it be otherwise? I sang nothing but his praises to Freddie. Over and over I affirmed his innocence.”

Jack gives the iPad a withering look. “And I’m sure everyone is going to believe that, coming from the man who can’t finish a sentence without the word ‘allegedly.’”

Chilton adjusts his collar; the tension in the air is making him sweat.

Hannibal lays down the iPad. Cocks his head, pierces Jack with a javelin stare. Has he come all this way to lecture Hannibal? What a waste of breath.

“I see,” he says. “You’d rather I didn’t mention Will at all. You’d rather I didn’t think about him.”

“I can’t control what you think.”

“No. You can’t.” And in the spirit of friendly exchange, Hannibal lectures Jack back. “You have made many mistakes with Will in the past. Left him exposed to many dangers. And now in an effort to atone, you’ve appointed yourself his guardian angel. The only thing standing

between him and harm." He smiles, almost bitterly. "Between him and me. But there are only so many variables you can control here, Jack. You can't protect Will from himself."

Slowly, maliciously, a smile cleaves Jack's face. "Oh, you are mistaken, Dr. Lecter. Very, very mistaken. I don't have to stand between you and Will to keep the two of you apart. It's Will's decision not to be here. His decision not to testify. The US Attorney General begged on his knees for Will to do it, but Will said no. He doesn't want to play any part in your trial. He doesn't want anything to do with you. So this little show you and Freddie Lounds are putting on, it's pointless. It's desperate. You're flailing in the dark, Hannibal, and no one's watching. I almost pity you. Almost."

Ah. Hannibal's eyes turn opaque.

Jack hasn't come here to lecture. Jack has come to gloat.

Erupting without bidding from the memory palace: barking barking barking barking barking. The racket almost drowns out Jack.

"Your lawyer's been angling for a plea bargain. Smart man, knows that insanity defense of yours isn't going to hold up in court. But Mr. Brauer's gonna be disappointed, because the prosecution is not inclined to bargain. We're pushing for the death penalty, and I'm confident we're going to get it. You set fire to your bridges, *friend*, and you're getting burned."

A Catalan garrote, that would be ideal. He has always wanted to try one. The Spaniards used it in capital punishment right into the twentieth century; efficient and officially sanctioned brutality, fitting for Jack. He would like to watch Jack's face when the spike penetrates the spinal column and the convulsions hit, limbs jerking like a puppet quarreling with its strings. After death, he'll spread Jack's ribs, expose that great, courageous heart so all might see it for what it really is, a cold and empty-chambered muscle. He'll eat it char-grilled. The rest of Jack he will make into a monument, mount him on a pedestal of bone—bone taken from Miriam, taken from Abigail, taken from all those innocents upon whom Jack has trodden in his unending march for justice. Yet that march has an end, it always has an end. He will issue Jack his pink slip, give him his final reprieve, honor him with the noblest sending-off a company man could ever wish for.

When Hannibal comes back to himself, he finds his finger tapping in prestissimo tempo against his knee. Chilton is watching him with wide skittish eyes, but Jack's expression is one of expectancy. Jack would like to see him angry. That is why Jack is here. To bear witness to the beast. To know him, finally, for what he is.

Hannibal, weakened by captivity and by an ever-pulsing inner wound, is only too happy to oblige him—but he catches himself. To rage and snap his teeth at Jack achieves nothing. It will only give Jack the proof he needs to sleep his nights in sound hatred, content in self-congratulation that at last he has put a true bad guy away, one of Pandora's uncanny monsters returned to its box. Jack would like to bury their friendship in the hardening concrete of the past, convince himself the many instances of shared food and meaningful conversation were an act, a magician's trick and nothing more. Hannibal must watch himself, ensure he never bequeaths such reassurance to Jack. Whatever happens, Jack must live in doubt.

He stops his finger's tapping. Folds his hands in his lap and favors Jack with an indulgent smile.

"You're right, Jack," he says, conversationally. "I was summoning you."

Jack's eyes narrow.

"I was hoping," Hannibal continues, "for old time's sake, you might do me a favor."

In a voice of disbelieving deadliness Jack repeats: "A favor."

The word registers with Chilton. His eyes leap to the stack of correspondence on the desk. "But, Hannibal, I thought—"

Hannibal is already plucking up the unsealed envelope. "Jack, would you kindly deliver this letter for me?"

Chilton's mouth gapes in silent protest. Jack looks from him to Hannibal, who balances the envelope in both hands like an offering. Slowly Jack's brow folds over. "Do I look like your mailman?"

Hannibal smothers a smile. "I'm sorry to inconvenience you," he says, "but you see, I don't have Will's address."

And with showy deliberation, he puts out his tongue and licks the seal on the envelope.

Oh Jack is staring now. His mighty shoulders lift and fall as he takes rumbling breaths.

"Hannibal," says Chilton, very peevish, "we agreed *I* would assist you with that letter."

Hannibal retracts his tongue. Though still staring at Jack, he addresses Chilton. "Ah, yes. My apologies, Doctor. Our conversation slipped my mind. By all means—why don't you take it?"

And he drops the envelope into his food slot. Chilton reaches for it, but Jack , who is closer, gets there first. He draws the letter out of the slot while Chilton twitches his fingers enviously. "I'd better handle this, Doctor," he says to Chilton.

"But it might be of clinical interest—"

"I'll handle it," snaps Jack. He holds the envelope by two fingers as if it's coated in slime.

"Jack," Hannibal says, with a swoop of urgency, "think carefully before you destroy that. You may protect Will in the short term, but if one day he finds out you kept this from him, you will lose whatever's left of his trust."

Jack only looks at him, flatly. "See you in court."

Then, to Chilton, "What's in this for you? Money? Respect? If you think you're getting anything valuable out of this, then think again. He'll make you pay for trusting him. He'll

make you pay dearly. Better watch yourself, Doctor. And watch *him*."

With this, Jack slides the letter into the inner pocket of his jacket and walks away.

Chilton stays standing there, mouth working furiously, fingers still twitching after the fabulous bounty of psychological insight that was almost in their grasp.

Jack will burn the letter. Hannibal can see the words already fulminating, a staring eye of flame engulfing the quotation from *The Count of Monte Cristo* until all that's left is 'vengeance.'

You're getting burned, Jack said. He will take the risk of angering Will in some far-off future for the pleasure of burning Hannibal in the now.

But what if Jack doesn't burn it? What if he does as requested, and conveys the letter to its intended recipient?

What then?

It is as if a hand twists a crank inside him, tightening his every ligament. He acted too quickly. An opportunity presented itself and he took it. Usually when he capitalizes on such opportunities they serve him well, but not this time. The letter is wrong, all wrong! He sees that now. It's as wrong as all the others. It was thwarted from the off; he wrote it having already convinced himself that it would never reach Will. Those jaunty threats, those dark intimations, those snarls, all calculated for Jack's eyes, not Will's. Chilton's eyes, not Will's. His grand show, but Will wasn't in the audience.

And suddenly a new possibility presents itself to him. It might not be the letter that is lacking. The fault may lie with the recipient. The Will to whom he addressed this message might not be there to receive it. After all, inside Hannibal's mind Will has already vanished. The same might be true of Will in the outer world. The Will he knew, the Will he staked his claim on, that Will might be lost to him, lost forever. Perhaps never there to begin with.

He is alone.

If Will reads the letter, he will know. He will see Hannibal's hopelessness emblazoned in every sentence. He will understand that the letter is addressed to a man who doesn't exist.

How will he react to this information? Will he gloat, as Jack gloated? Will he laugh? Will he throw the letter to the winds like so much garbage? Hannibal doesn't know. He no longer possesses the ability to predict Will.

He must have emitted some noise of distress; his neighbors Louis and Abel Gideon are staring at him.

Louis snickers. “Guess even cannibals get the blues.”

Abel, however, is solemn. “Give this place enough time, it gets to everyone, even him. Abandon all hope ye who enter here.”

Hannibal buries himself in the past. Systematically stalks the exhibit halls of his memory palace, inhabiting every recollection, playing them through to the close, then stepping out of the paintings always somehow unsatisfied.

The Baroque galleries remain his favorites. At present he is revisiting his Vermeers. Within the planes of burnished sunlight in *Girl Interrupted at Her Music*, he finds Abigail sitting at his dining table, poking at the remains of her portion of *blanquette de veau*.

“Are you finished?” he asks patiently.

Looking guilty, she lays down her fork. “Sorry,” she says. “It’s really good. I know I shouldn’t let it go to waste...it’s just, I’m not hungry.”

“Some days we have no appetite. Nothing to apologize for.”

“It’s that place,” says Abigail, tremulous. “I can’t go back there. Couldn’t I stay here, only for tonight?”

“You know that isn’t possible.” He lays a hand gently on her wrist. “The doctors expect you back.”

“I feel like a prisoner there. Always someone watching me, as if—” She swallows the end of her sentence, but he knows.

“You’ve done nothing wrong,” he says, tenderly. “You won’t be there forever. One day soon, you will be the determiner of your own destiny.”

A mirthless laugh from Abigail. “That day can’t come fast enough.”

He examines her for a moment. Her skin almost translucent in the dark, her eyes over-bright. A delicate creature to be nurtured and protected. The only thing that belies this image is the feel of her wrist beneath his fingers: steady and strong and cool-skinned. She possesses very capable hands.

“There are things you can do,” he says, “to make your hospitalization more tolerable for you.”

“Besides climbing over the wall?”

He inclines his head, a very mild scold. “Climbing over the wall incurs suspicion if you are observed. However, no one can observe you when you climb over the wall of your own mind.”

Her eyebrows draw together. “Are you asking me to do drugs again?”

He smiles. “I am advising you to build a place inside yourself. A place you can escape to whenever you need it. Perhaps that place looks like your old bedroom, or a peaceful clearing in the woods. It doesn’t matter how it appears to you, only that it is yours in every detail.”

She is watching him with skeptical amusement. “Is this what you tell your patients? Imagine a happy place, full of rainbows and butterflies and lemon meringue pie?”

“No pie is necessary. You fill it with your memories: pleasant memories, terrible memories, and everything in between. You choose which to visit, and when. It can be a safe harbor to you, your sanctuary from the doldrums of everyday life.”

Abigail watches him with knowing eyes. “My memories aren’t a safe harbor.”

“You have happy memories of your father. I know you do.”

She looks away. “Yeah. But they don’t *feel* happy anymore.”

“You can get the happiness back,” he insists. “Order your memories into a mental structure of your own choosing. Make them yours again. Your past doesn’t have to control you, Abigail. You can control the past.”

She just watches him, thoughtful and wary, but with the barest softening of affection for him, for his earnestness, for his oddness.

“There now,” he says. “Time for dessert.” He folds his napkin on the table and rises from his chair. “Funnily enough, meringue is involved. I hope you’ll enjoy it, even if it isn’t lemon.”

“Do you need any help?” She starts getting up to follow him, but he raises a hand.

“I’ll only be a few minutes. Stay here; you don’t want to spoil the surprise.”

“I’m not a fan of surprises.”

“You’ll like this one.”

He strides off to the kitchen. Retrieves from the freezer his omelette à la norvégienne, otherwise known as a Baked Alaska. Into the oven it goes, while he heats dark rum on the stovetop. The kitchen fills with heady aromas, and Hannibal smiles to himself, imagining what Abigail’s reaction will be. Meanwhile the Hannibal of the Baltimore State Hospital is smiling too. He already knows how Abigail will react. When she sees the flaming dessert her self-possession will slip for just an instant, and her highly uncharacteristic look of childlike awe will pierce him pleasurably to the quick. It will give him such pride, knowing he can coax out this expression of pure innocence from behind her armor. This moment is quite precious to him; he has chosen to replay this particular memory specifically to see it. As he pours the flaming rum into the velvet folds of meringue he finds himself really smiling now, smiling with all his teeth.

The flaming plate leads the way as he exits the kitchen and proceeds back to the dining room, every second that elapses bringing him one instant nearer to seeing Abigail's look of startled joy.

In the dim light the flaming meringue casts strange shadows on the dining room walls. Abigail turns, lays eyes on his surprise.

But Hannibal cannot appreciate the beauty of this moment. Because Abigail is no longer alone at the dining table. Will is sitting across from her.

The conflagrant dessert illuminates Hannibal's expression of frozen shock.

"Whoa!" says Abigail, beaming at him, but he pays her no heed.

It is Will. Not the blank-eyed abomination from his dream, that dreadful mockery, but Will as Will is supposed to be: shoulders hunched, lips thin, eyes slightly unfocused, a characteristic expression of absent focus on his face.

But Will wasn't invited to this dinner. This is not what happened.

Will doesn't spare Hannibal a glance: all his attention is bent on Abigail.

"Look at you," he says under his breath. "I've never seen you smile like that. Not sure I've ever seen you smile at all. Why here? Why is this the place where you let your guard down? Of all the people you could have trusted, why him? You could have chosen Alana. Or Jack. Well, not Jack. But maybe, just maybe you could have talked to me. I know I couldn't have given you what you needed, but at least I would have been better than him. Anyone's better than him. Why did you do it? What do you see in him?"

Abigail doesn't answer any of these questions. She is watching Hannibal expectantly. "It's already burning out," she says, with faint disappointment, as the flames begin to dissipate.

Will heaves a sigh. Rubs his face. And Hannibal sees his fingernails, bitten and scabbed. Recognizes his dark flannel shirt. This is Will of Wolf Trap.

"Will," he says.

This, of course, is a departure from the mnemonic record. The memory of Abigail doesn't even register it, merely sits and waits for him to set the Baked Alaska on the table.

But Will hears him. His hands drop from his face. He stares at Hannibal, his wide eyes reflecting the dying play of the flames, suddenly as surprised to see Hannibal as Hannibal is to see Will.

"You're here," Hannibal says, unnecessarily.

"You can see me," Will says, equally unnecessarily.

Hannibal recovers himself somewhat. He places the dessert on the table in front of Abigail. Resumes his seat at the head of the table so that he might stare at Will from closer quarters.

“I can always see you,” he says, and as he says it he finds it to be true. A wave of ecstatic relief breaks over him, followed by an easy calm. As if some broken cog in the grand machine has been identified and repaired, and now all is pneumatic harmony again.

Instead of answering him, Will half stands, hands planted on the table. “Come with me, Abigail,” he says. “You don’t have to stay here if you don’t want to.”

“Can I cut the cake?” Abigail asks, oblivious, already reaching for the knife.

“She can’t see you, I’m afraid,” Hannibal says, unable to hide his smile.

“Ah.” Will drops back into his chair. “Only you, then.”

“Only me.”

“You couldn’t see me before.” A strange thrill in Will’s voice. “Nobody could. I tried to talk to you, I tried to *stop* you, over and over I tried, but nothing I did or said ever made a difference. It was like I didn’t exist.”

“One for you,” says Abigail, sliding a plate with a slab of browned meringue in front of Hannibal. “And one for me.”

Hannibal examines Will: his shaking hands, his pallor. “I told you not to leave Wolf Trap,” he says. “I told you it wasn’t safe, but you wouldn’t listen. Where did you go?”

Will frowns. “I—I don’t know. I don’t think I *went* anywhere. I stayed still; it was the world around me that shifted. It became different places, lots of places, some of them I knew, some I didn’t. They’d just appear, and disappear, like slides in a projector.”

“What did you see?”

“I saw…” Will’s expression once again loses its focus. The enraptured thrill in his voice intensifies. “I saw a house on a winding street paved with cobblestones. A woman lived there. She had a laundry line, and all the clothes hanging there were red.”

Hannibal says nothing.

“Who was she?” Will asks him.

“What else have you seen?”

Something in Will’s eyes sharpens. He senses Hannibal’s discomfort and likes it. “An old man, hit by a car, his intestines strewn across a mountain road like party streamers.”

“Ah,” says Hannibal, placing the image.

“I tried to help him. Give him some comfort. But he couldn’t hear me, he couldn’t see me…. I lost him.”

“*You* were the one who was lost, Will.”

Slowly Will loses his frown. He stares at Hannibal, shaky and arrested. He nods.

“Well, you’re found now.” Hannibal reaches for Will’s arm and finds it solid, warm, and real.

“This is great,” says Abigail, fork in her mouth. “Guess I should reconsider my opinion on surprises.”

“Better not do that,” says Will, even though she can’t hear him.

And Hannibal decides this memory has been too long imposed upon. “Come,” he says, hand tightening on Will’s arm. “Let’s go somewhere we can talk freely.”

With one last look at Abigail, Will follows him out of the dining room and into the kitchen. Hannibal mounts the stairs.

“Where are we going?” Will asks. “To your study?”

“No.” Hannibal is smiling to himself. This is a risk—and having just had Will returned to him he should be chary of such reckless impulses—but he is so very curious. An experiment is called for.

From his position two stairs up, he turns to Will. He extends one arm down to him. “Better take my hand.”

Will stares at it as if it is a raw liver Hannibal has just offered him. “*Why*?”

Hannibal’s answer is a significant smile. He waits, and Will, reticent but firm, laces their fingers together. They climb the stairs together.

At the landing they pass through liquid shadows and gauzy sunbeams. Hannibal smells dust and old paper and a note of perfume. He makes an abrupt left turn, and steps right out of *Girl Interrupted at Her Music*.

And lo and behold, he still has hold of Will. He retains the same mass and substance he had inside the memory. Will stands there, wide-eyed in the curated gloom of the gallery. He releases Hannibal’s hand and whips around, staring at the little Vermeer.

“What just happened?”

“You haven’t done that before,” Hannibal guesses.

“No.” And then, with a startled look. “You changed your clothes.”

Hannibal sidles next to him, hands in the pockets of his linen suit. “I have indeed.”

Will gapes at him, positively gobsmacked. Then once again turns to stare at the Vermeer behind him. “Were we inside that painting?”

Hannibal looks at it, too. “What do you see, Will?”

Will scratches his jaw, uncertain. “It’s a Vermeer.”

“Is that all you see?”

Will senses the challenge in Hannibal’s voice. Turns back to the painting with narrowed eyes, and Hannibal can feel the force of his perception brought to bear upon it.

“I…see…*Abigail*.”

Ah, miraculous. Hannibal plucks at Will’s elbow, turns him slightly. “And that one?”

He is indicating another Vermeer, *A Girl Asleep*. Will walks up to it, scrutinizes it so closely his nose almost touches the canvas.

“Abigail again,” he says, wonder in his voice. “Abigail, when she was in a coma…”

“Very good.” Hannibal is smiling widely now. He never thought he’d have this chance, never considered the possibility of a visitor inside these halls. It is very gratifying to have someone here who can finally appreciate his work.

Will goes from painting to painting, almost running. “They’re all Abigail! Abigail playing Scrabble in her room at Port Haven. Abigail reading a book in your study. Abigail in Minnesota, going through her photographs. Abigail—” He freezes in front of *Girl with A Pearl Earring*. He averts his eyes from the painting, fists clutched tightly at his sides.

“I’m sorry,” says Hannibal, very quietly. “It wasn’t the outcome I had hoped for. You forced my hand.”

Will squeezes his eyes shut. “You shouldn’t have that hanging on a wall.”

“I hang everything. The beautiful and the ugly side by side.”

Will says nothing. Slowly Hannibal approaches him, takes his hand again. Finds it clammy and limp.

“There’s more I want to show you,” he says.

He leads Will through the Baroque galleries, past Hals and Rubens, Van Dyck and Velazquez, Poussin and Caravaggio. Hannibal doesn’t ask Will what he sees within the frames, but he can tell Will is absorbing everything, the sum total of Hannibal’s life in Baltimore laid bare before his eyes. Hannibal deliberately avoids the velvet curtain that conceals the spiral stairway up to his Rembrandts—all in good time.

“Where’s the music coming from?” Will asks.

For the plaintive tinkling of *The Goldberg Variations* surrounds them, follows them from room to room.

Hannibal considers the question. “It isn’t coming from anywhere.” Then, with an amused hum, he adds, “Though you might say it’s coming from me.”

If Will understands this, he doesn't show it. He nods at a set of heavy wooden doors. "And what's through there?"

"Ah," says Hannibal. "Let's find out."

Together they pull the doors open. Hannibal's eyes fasten on Will's face as he steps out into the sundrenched marble of the main hall. Hannibal hasn't yet had occasion to see this Will in such good light. His eyes become vivid sea green, little shoots of gold appear in his curling hair. Hannibal can see every pore of his face, every hair of his beard (which needs a trim). So real; so very, very real. Hannibal breathes out a sigh of pleasure.

Will stares for several long minutes at Wound Man. His adam's apple bobs out his astonishment as he surveys the Girl on the Stag mounted at the center of her babbling fountain. He observes the Lovers from every angle, his expression completely shuttered. When he finally speaks, his voice is a hush.

"What is this?" he asks. "All of this. Where are we? What is this place?"

Hannibal cherishes Will's rapt, awestruck expression. "What do you think it is?"

"I think…" Will's voice is thick, the words slow to form. "…this might be…*hell*."

Hannibal is so startled he lets out a bark of laughter. Will flinches.

"In a way it is," Hannibal says. "I myself am hell."

For a second Will just looks at him. Then suddenly he laughs, too—a high, almost hysterical peal. His laughter goes on a little too long, and listening to it, Hannibal pities him. He had almost forgotten…but this is just a memory, after all. A memory stretched beyond its limits. A child awake long past its bedtime. Poor Will has seen too much.

Once again, Hannibal takes his hand. "Come with me."

Will doesn't question him. They walk back through the Baroque galleries and he remains silent, although his eyes slide inexorably from painting to painting. This time Hannibal makes straight for the velvet curtain and the spiral staircase beyond it. They climb—and as they climb, the sounds of the barking dogs start up, getting steadily louder. Hearing them, Will stiffens the hand in Hannibal's grip.

"Where are you taking me?"

"There's nothing to be afraid of."

And Hannibal leads Will, who lags warily behind him. They venture up to the top of the tower, where the circular room with its dusky light and reverent stillness awaits them. The line of ghostly self-portraits seem to stare in consternation as Will and Hannibal walk to the center of the room. Here the barking dogs are louder than ever.

Will twists around, taking in each and every painting. "Me," he says, simply.

“Yes.”

“You keep me in a garret.”

“A jewel in a modest setting, the better to show off its radiance.”

Will has nothing to say to that. His eyes find *Abraham’s Sacrifice*, and in an instant all the blood leaves his face.

“No,” he says.

He tries to wring his hand from Hannibal’s grasp, in vain.

“I won’t go back there!”

“Wolf Trap is where you belong,” says Hannibal, as consolingly as he can.

“No, it isn’t.”

“It isn’t safe for you out here.”

Will’s voice hardens, drops in pitch. “You think it’s safe for *you*?”

Hannibal examines him, wondering what to do. Finally he asks, “Then where do you want to go?”

Will, surprised by the question, only stares at him. He swallows. “I want…I want…”

“Yes?”

“I want what you promised me.”

How very curious. “What did I promise?”

Will’s eyebrows draw up. For an instant he looks transported, almost worshipful. He whispers: “My *freedom*.”

Now Hannibal frowns. What does freedom look like to this memory, constrained as it is by times past and places lost, unmoored inside the labyrinthine hallways of the palace?

“And when did I promise you that?”

Will reviews his own memory slowly, haltingly; for him this action must still be a novelty. “You said—you said it was all you ever wanted for me. You didn’t put me in prison. You set me free. You *promised me*.”

And Hannibal, with a lick of annoyance, understands where this miscommunication originated. “I didn’t make that promise to you.”

Will’s turn to frown. “You did.”

“I made it to Will Graham.”

The frown deepens. “I *am* Will Graham.”

Hannibal smiles, faint and sad. “No, I’ve already told you. You’re not.”

Silence. Except, of course, for the dogs, who bark and bark and bark.

Hannibal continues on, as gently as he can. “You are a memory of Will Graham. A shadow he cast inside my mind.”

“A memory?” Will repeats, with a disbelieving sneer.

And Hannibal realizes he will have to explain the matter much more clearly. “Everything inside this palace is my memory. Every sight you see, and the eyes you see it with.”

Will is smiling in earnest now. “No,” he says. “Oh no, no, no. You’re lying.”

“I assure you I’m not.”

“We’ve been down this road before, remember? This is a *trick*. You’re trying to trick me.”

“—Will—” Hannibal shakes his head, half-amused, half-frustrated.

Barking, barking, barking, barking, barking, barking.

Meanwhile Will is wound up and canters on, talking more to himself than to Hannibal. “No no no no. This is what you always do. Infect me with doubt. Paint my world in your colors. It won’t work. It never works on me for long. You know that.”

Hannibal is beginning to lose patience. “You are a memory.”

“Don’t lie to me. I hate it when you lie to me.”

“You are a broken memory. An artifact from a mistake I failed to correct in time—you are an *accident*. But I can make this right—if you’ll just come with me, I can—”

“—I know who I am!”

“You are not Will Graham.”

“I KNOW WHO I AM.”

The words ring out, fill the room.

Suddenly the dogs fall quiet.

Hannibal, caught off-guard, turns back to *Abraham’s Sacrifice*, to assure himself that the clamor has ceased. A split-second miscalculation. When he turns back around, he finds that Will has vanished.

Hannibal stands alone in the silent garret, surrounded by staring Rembrandts. Will might have disappeared into one of them. Or perhaps he simply flickered out of existence, for his existence, the realities of his existence, were too overwhelming for him to face. But no, Hannibal knows Will of Wolf Trap still exists—can feel that certainty pulsing in his every breath. Will is alive, at large inside the palace. And Hannibal decides to allow him to remain that way. Let Will roam free for the present. He will understand the unsustainability of his freedom soon enough. Then it will be back to Wolf Trap.

With his hands in his pockets and music flowing through him, Hannibal walks the vaulted passageways of his palace, slowly making his way back the outer world. An outer world that has just become so much easier to live in.

He has Will back. Everything is perfect again, everything clear, everything right. Even the letter, his erstwhile communiqué. However ill starred the circumstances of its conception might have been, however sloppy its execution, it will still get the job done. And with this thought, Hannibal finds himself riding a crest of pure certainty, certainty as startlingly clear and exultant as his conviction that Will is still alive somewhere within the palace.

Suddenly he knows beyond a doubt that Jack will deliver the letter, and Will will read it. Will will read it, and Will will understand.

God’s in his heaven, all’s right with the world. Or, apologies to Browning, Will’s in his palace, all’s right with the world.

Hannibal smiles to himself and walks on.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Already the table is prepared.

Chapter Notes

Yeah, I know. Long time no see! ~~But I don't have to see you to see you.~~ Blame S3, which took up a lot of my fannish attention these last few months, and blame the overweening ambition of this next section of the fic, which is entirely concerned with Hannibal's titular Barnum and Bailey performance. (But mostly blame me, your erstwhile author, who is a shameful slowpoke.) This chapter is so big, so complex, so razzle-dazzley, that I've decided to split it into three parts. And since #2 is already mostly written, for once I can sincerely promise you that you won't be waiting long for the next update.

Thank you for your patience! I hope you believe what Hannibal so keenly believes: that good things come to those who wait...

“How about this one?”

Off the wardrobe rack Leonard Brauer plucks another shrink-wrapped suit and holds it against the glass wall for his client’s inspection, but Hannibal fixes his eyes on Brauer’s. He can tell without looking at the suit that it is hunter green, boxy-shouldered, a slouchy polyester blend.

Brauer gets the message. Disappointed, he lowers the hanger. “Ok, what’s wrong with this one?”

“It’s not to my taste.”

“You’re not dressing for a cotillion here, Dr. Lecter. You can’t wear paisley and windowpane check to your own murder trial.”

“Why not?” Hannibal isn’t challenging Brauer; he is simply curious.

“Draws attention to itself,” snips Brauer, annoyed at having to state the self-evident. He turns back to the wardrobe rack, flicking through its drab codex of taupes, blues, browns, and grays.

Freddie chimes in from her folding chair, which she has positioned on the far side of the radiator, ceding to Brauer the prime space in front of Hannibal’s cell. “You forget, Mr. Brauer, this is Hannibal the Cannibal you’re talking to. He’s going to draw attention to himself regardless of what he’s wearing.”

“All the more reason to dress down.” Brauer holds up another suit. “Navy blue. Great color on a defendant, navy blue. Very dignified. Respectful. Repentant.”

Hannibal gives the suit a single heavy-lidded glance.

“If he wears that,” says Freddie, under her breath, “then he’ll *really* have something to repent.”

Hannibal permits himself a tiny smile. Brauer loses his patience.“You know, Miss Lounds, for a fly on the wall, you sure are doing an awful lot of buzzing.”

“Sorry,” she says, unrepentantly, her digital recorder winking in her lap. “But I’m always vocal when it comes to crime. Doesn’t matter whether it’s a crime committed by a serial killer or… ah…by *Men’s Wearhouse*.”

Brauer rehangs the rejected outfit with a little too much force. “There’s nothing wrong with any of these suits! Listen to me, I’ve racked up a hell of a lot more hours in a courtroom than either of you two, and I know what clothing works, and doesn’t work, on a defendant charged with multiple counts of murder. You can’t look like you’re having too much fun out there. A courtroom is a theater—you have to dress the part.”

Freddie raises her eyebrows. “Dress for the job you want, not the job you have?”

“And what job are you dressing for?” Brauer eyes her fur-trimmed blazer and zebra stripe heels. “Gangster’s moll?”

She smiles thinly.

Hannibal, ever the diplomat, diffuses their tiff. “Miss Lounds has a point, Mr. Brauer. You are dressing me for the wrong part.”

“I’m dressing you for the part of mentally ill man who has been woefully mischaracterized by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. That’s the part you’re playing in that courtroom, Dr. Lecter. I thought we’d agreed on that.”

Hannibal merely looks at him.

Brauer sighs. “Then what part do you think you’re playing?”

Freddie answers for him. “Circus ringmaster?” She removes a fat sheaf of magazines from her handbag. “Have you been following Hannibal’s press lately? Doesn’t really jibe with the oh-woe-is-me angle.”

She holds up *People Magazine*, which has Hannibal on its cover in moody profile. She reads the headline: “MODERN-DAY MONSTER.”

The next magazine is *US Weekly*. “DOCTOR DEATH.”

She completes the trifecta with *Time Magazine*, which features a close shot in black-and-white of Hannibal straight on, his eyes vacuum pits. “IS THIS THE FACE OF EVIL?”

Hannibal beams at his own satanic visage. Meanwhile Brauer says, slightly feebly, “Well, at least they phrased it as a question!” He straightens the lapels of his own suit, which is dove-gray and sharply tailored. “Of course you love the feeding frenzy,” he says to Freddie. “You’re the one who set the tone with your ‘exclusive sit-down.’ It might be his face on the magazine covers, but you’re pictured in every one of those feature stories, aren’t you? And now you’re everybody’s favorite TV contributor, too. Who’re you talking to tonight, huh? Geraldo Rivera?”

“Anderson Cooper,” says Freddie, waggling her eyebrows.

Which elicits from Brauer a sound half-impressed, half-disgusted. He turns back to Hannibal. “I warned you about her. It’s her own reputation she’s gilding, not yours.”

Hannibal regards him with unblinking tranquility.

“Have it your way,” says Brauer, with a shrug. “What say do I have? I’m just the attorney trying to save you from the needle. Hey Barbara Walters, how about you shut that thing off for a second? Next thing I tell my client is not for public consumption.”

Freddie glances at Hannibal, who gives her the nod; she snaps off the recorder.

Brauer rolls his eyes at this little interaction before delivering his news. “Last night the prosecution put out an updated witness list. Guess whose name they added? Will Graham’s.”

Up up up go Freddie’s eyebrows.

Hannibal’s face remains carefully blank, but Brauer isn’t fooled. “Now don’t get too excited! It’s just a formality. The prosecution isn’t going to call Will Graham; they just want to know they’ve got him waiting in the wings if their case goes tits up.” Brauer takes a step closer to the glass, raises his pointer fingers. “So you better make sure those tits go *up*, Dr. Lecter. If you ever want to see Will Graham again, then I suggest you wear the monkey suit, stick to the script, and be on your best behavior inside that courtroom. And for the love of God, *stop talking to Freddie Lounds*.”

Once Brauer has wheeled himself and the wardrobe rack out of the subbasement, Freddie ambles up to the glass, arms swinging.

“So… about to issue me my walking papers?”

Hannibal considers her. Underneath the faux nonchalance, Freddie is nervous.

“Not today,” he says, and she relaxes into authentic nonchalance.

“Leonard Brauer is trying to tempt you with an incentive that isn’t there. The prosecution is never going to call Will Graham. Jack Crawford would have a conniption. And if we’re being honest here, Will is more trouble than he’s worth on the witness stand. He’s unreliable and completely uncontrollable. After eight months in this hospital, who knows what story he’d tell up there? Not the FBI’s preferred version of events, that’s for sure.”

“And yet he’s on the list.”

“And yet,” she echoes. Her eyes narrow. “What are you planning to do?”

His expression is mild but impenetrable. So Freddie presses harder.

“I know you have a plan, Hannibal. A strategy. To have your day in court and eat it, too. Beat the death penalty. Stick it to Jack Crawford. See Will Graham again.”

He tilts his head at her, cold eyes glittering. “And how would I manage all that, Freddie? I am but a simple prisoner, at the mercy of the state.”

“Are you? Or are you ‘the face of evil?’”

He smiles. “I would like you to publish something for me.” He already has it on his desk, written out on drawing paper.

“Let me guess,” says Freddie, mischievous. “Attorney au gratin?”

“Not a recipe this time.” Hannibal puts the paper through the food slot. “I would describe this as more of an essay.”

“An essay?” She snaps it up. “What’s the subject?”

Hannibal smiles at her eagerness. “Fashion.”

Freddie posts it the next day with photographic accompaniment: old shots of Hannibal in his three-piece ensembles of yore. The essay is a seemingly meandering series of Hannibal’s observations on personal style: how to imbue one’s wardrobe with taste and flair, looking to the past for sartorial inspiration, personal adornment as social capital, clothing as a storytelling tool with which one can enact one’s identity for others and for oneself. The article ends with Hannibal’s first use of the first-person pronoun:

There is truth in the old adage, 'clothes make the man.' But in our global economy, other people make our clothes for us, and consequently these woefully underpaid strangers make us, too. We are not, and have never been, the tellers of our own stories. As I prepare to hear my story told in the most public of forums, the questions I ask myself are these: who am I now, and who makes me so?

And beneath this is printed Hannibal's tailoring measurements, recalled with ease out of his memory palace.

Bespoke suits deluge the Baltimore State Hospital courtesy of every ambitious designer in the country. Chilton complains at first—"My desk is buried under an avalanche of *plaid*!"—but after Hannibal assures him the suits are his to keep once the trial is over, Chilton has them pressed and hung in airtight garment bags in his personal closet. Privately Hannibal thinks the suits will need a ruinous amount of tailoring if they are ever to fit little Chilton. But Hannibal is one to scoff. He can't quite fit into them himself. His remembered measurements reflect the proportions of a free man, unmarked and well fed. He is leaner now: all tendons, sinew, and bone.

But inside Hannibal's mind, he still fills out the lines of his tuxedo admirably. He makes a minute adjustment to his bowtie as he parts the golden curtains that separate him from the private opera box. La Scala, 1998.

The box is not so private anymore. Will sits in one of the velvet chairs, back rounded as he dangles his forearms over the railing. Hannibal feels a shock of delight at seeing him there. Every time he happens upon this Will, it is a pleasant surprise. These meetings have been happening more frequently of late; either Hannibal is growing adept at choosing memories Will is currently inhabiting, or else Will has learned to anticipate his choices. Perhaps they are simply drawn to each other, linked together by an enchanted thread that winds its way through the labyrinth of his past.

The orchestra swells. The audience, as one, gives a silken shiver and edges closer to the stage.

Hannibal lowers himself soundlessly into the chair next to Will. Amidst these rarefied Milanese, Will looks very out of place in his flannel shirt and trousers, with his overgrown curls and scabby fingernails. But he isn't uncomfortable; he sits calm and confident as he stares down at the singers. There is, however, something unfocused in his stare, as if another performance fights for his attention, one unfolding within the black box theater of his mind.

But this Will is a memory, Hannibal reminds himself. A reconstruction. It possesses no inner life, no secret thoughts. Will in seeming, not Will in flesh. But sitting here in Hannibal's opera box he is *so real*.

Hannibal notes how his own breath stirs the hair at Will's temple as he whispers in his ear: "*Don Giovanni*. Not where I expected to find you."

Will glances at Hannibal without turning his head. His eyes reflect the great chandelier in twinkling points. “I’m too much of a philistine for opera?”

Hannibal looks out at the ocean of pearls and lace beneath them, the black-slicked hair, the white gloves, the mirror-gloss of patent leather. “I was thinking only of your aversion to crowds.”

“With this crowd, who could blame me?” Will’s voice is quiet and sly. “But it’s a lot easier to be among them when I know they can’t see me.”

Hannibal nods, knowing the feeling. “The freedom of being unseen.”

“Oh”—an acid laugh from Will—“you think this is freedom?”

“Isn’t it?” Hannibal watches him closely, wondering where Will has been, what sights he has witnessed. “You come and go as you please.”

“Rats in a maze come and go as they please. With a lab tech logging their every move.”

“You believe I’m studying you.”

“Why, I’m your grand experiment.” And Will smiles at him, a bright ironic smile, both sad and sweet. “Always have been. You make your observations, collect your data. In this place you control all the variables. It’s a clinician’s paradise. Now if you don’t mind”—and he turns back to the opera—“we’ve come to a good part. The demons are about to drag Don Giovanni down to hell.”

“A very good part,” Hannibal agrees, watching as the singer playing Giovanni howls with pain and terror.

For a moment they both listen, their heads tilted at the same angle and their eyes shut, adrift on waves of music.

“Beautiful,” Hannibal breathes. “Familiar with *Don Giovanni*, Will?”

“I’m familiar with this memory.” Will opens his eyes and gives Hannibal a gentle, penetrating look. “It’s one of your favorites, isn’t it?”

Hannibal nods questioningly. So Will explains, “This memory has a particular glow to it, a patina left by repeated visits and tender handling.”

Hannibal sees no such glow, only La Scala’s innate majesty. How fascinating that Will’s experience of the memory palace should be different from his own, but it is logical. After all, Will is made of the same light and matter as Hannibal’s memories. Perhaps he looks at them and sees his own miraculous essence reflected back at him.

Will says, as if in afterthought, “Wolf Trap had that glow, too.” And at Hannibal’s hastily concealed look of satisfaction, “No. I know what you’re thinking, but I won’t go back there. If you want me back in Wolf Trap, Hannibal, then you’re going to have to drag me back. Kicking and screaming.”

Giovanni kicks and screams as the demons lift him above their heads, grotesque faces leering as they carry him into the offstage inferno.

“It’s your home,” Hannibal says. “Your place of birth. You miss it.”

Will shakes his head firmly. “I was born in Louisiana.”

Hannibal knows better than to get into this argument again. Instead he asks:

“Then why visit this memory with its distinctive patina? Why revel in Wolf Trap’s telltale glow?”

“I’m visiting all your favorite memories. Giving myself the full tour. Hannibal Lecter’s greatest hits.”

“Why?” he presses.

Will merely gives a little shrug. “Maybe I’m collecting data, too.”

On the night before Hannibal’s trial, the orderlies serve him filet mignon at his request. Grilled, if not to perfection, with passable skill. He smells it before he sees it and his eyelids flutter with pleasure. Chilton has had the kitchen staff plate the meal on gold-bordered china atop a silver tray, accompanied by a glass of Chateau Margaux and two ceramic candlesticks. The only concession to safety is the cutlery: yellow plastic. The meat is so tender Hannibal has no trouble carving it up.

He spears a morsel on plastic tines and raises it to eye level. Crisp sear, bloody center. A sudden upsurge of music from the Bose speakers above his bed: *Don Giovanni*, of course. Since happening upon Will at La Scala, Hannibal has listened to nothing else. The recording has now reached the final scene. *Già la mensa è preparata.* Appropriate.

He lowers the meat to his tongue and pierces it with his teeth. Chews languidly as the meat’s warm juices fill his mouth. Iron, butter, and smoke unite upon his palate. Like tasting life itself.

His first bite of meat in over a year. He takes another, and another, until the steak is gone.

“*Questo è il fin di chi fa mal*,” the chorus sings, “*e de' perfidi la morte alla vita è sempre ugual*.”

He rises with the dawn, feeling anticipation and a quiet sense of well-being. Barney leads him to the showers, where Hannibal stands with eyes closed under the steaming spray, a silver mask of water cascading down his face. On returning to his cell, he moisturizes, scents himself, styles his hair and finally dresses in his chosen suit: immaculate cream-colored wool

crosshatched with gold, the jacket double-vented and double-breasted, offset by a burgundy shirt and matching floral-patterned necktie.

“Look at this guy,” says Louie, Hannibal’s neighbor, staring in contempt and wonder as Hannibal adjusts his waistcoat. “You getting married or something?”

Hannibal smiles grandly.

“Oh, he’s going to the courthouse, Louie,” says Abel Gideon, “but when he gets there he won’t find flowers, rings, or anybody pretty to kiss.”

“We’ll have to see about that,” Hannibal says, “won’t we?”

Gideon raises his eyebrows. “Oh ho, high hopes!” He leans forward on his cot with his hands braced on his thighs like someone’s opinionated uncle. “Well, if anybody can transmute their hopes into a reality, it’s you, Dr. Lecter. Gotta admit, you’ve come a long way. A very long way. When you first got here you were all dried up, gray and skinny as a worm. Now here you are: a beautiful butterfly! Amazing, isn’t it, what nine months in a cocoon will do? I wonder—after a dozen life sentences, what do you think you’ll turn into?”

“Quiet in there,” the orderly Gornergrat barks, as he tries to listen to his walkie-talkie. “The van is here, Lecter. Time to go.”

Gornergrat and Barney cuff Hannibal. Barney, Hannibal notices with interest, is careful to secure the handcuffs below the cuff of his sleeves so as not to damage them. Not for Hannibal’s sake does Barney spare the expensive fabric. Despite Hannibal’s good behavior, Barney remains leery of him. No, Barney spares the fabric for its own sake. It appears that Barney is secretly a man of taste. And he’s not the only one.

As the orderlies march Hannibal down the hallway, Gideon leans up against the glass of his cell. “Oh, and, Dr. Lecter!” They meet eyes. “*Love* the suit.”

Hannibal sways in the back of the darkened van, manacles clinking against the mesh of his cage. He knows they are approaching the courthouse when Gornergrat starts abusing the horn. Through the van’s windscreen Hannibal gets his first glimpse of the cement monstrosity that is about to become his big top: a Brutalist construction with slit windows and a hard swelling of a dome. A building as grim as any prison.

Despite being massed in front of a courthouse—that timeworn symbol of law and state—there is nothing respectable about the crowd. Onlookers spill off the front steps into the street. They cram themselves between the news vehicles, scuttle up the streetlights for a better view. They chew gum, wear fanny packs, take selfies. Handwritten signs fly, many emblazed with quotes from scripture, rapturous pronouncements of doom. Meanwhile boom poles genuflect as a dozen different news crews prepare for live broadcasts.

“What a zoo,” Gornergrat remarks, and honks with greater urgency.

The sounds draw the crowd's attention. Hannibal can feel their stares buffeting the sides of the van. "Is that him?" he hears, in many voices, in several languages. "Could that be Hannibal the Cannibal?"

These many months he has been nothing but images and words to these people: pixels, breath, and myth. Now here he is, a physical presence in their midst. Their brazen voices fall to a hush as awareness of him leaps from person to person, until the whole crowd is infected, and silent.

"Look at you," says Gornergrat. "Mister Popularity."

Barney twists in the van's jump seat, scans the crowd. "Better use the side entrance," he says.

But before they can make the turn, a news van draws up perpendicular to the BSHCI van, cutting them off. This inspires Gornergrat to greater heights of honking.

"This isn't a parking lot, buddy! Come on, move it along!"

The driver-side window of the news van rolls down, and Freddie Lounds, in aviator shades, pokes her head out. "Sorry!" she says. "Can't hear a thing over this crowd! Are you talking to me?"

"You!" Gornergrat recognizes her. "What the hell are you doing? Move your van!"

Freddie only smiles apologetically, mimes deafness.

"Can you believe this?" Gornergrat says to Barney, who is directing a stern look at Hannibal.

"I surely can."

Hannibal is as smooth as glass. "Looks like we'll have to use the front entrance after all, Barney."

The orderlies flank him as he climbs the steps, but no crowd control is necessary. The public draws away from him, repelled by their own fascination, phones raised in front of them like talismans to ward off evil. Despite the heavy shackles, Hannibal walks easily, head high, the clear morning light throwing the bite scar on his cheek into livid visibility. His eyes slide from one face to the next, taking them in, pressing them back.

The news teams are the first to recover. They edge forward, microphones brandished, and begin lobbing questions at him:

"How are you feeling, Hannibal? Are you nervous? Excited?"

"Dr. Lecter, do you think the prosecution has a strong case?"

“Dr. Lecter! Dr. Lecter! What did you do with the bodies the FBI hasn’t been able to recover? Where did you bury them?”

“How did you get the girl on the stag’s head, Hannibal?”

“Why do you eat people, Dr. Lecter? What’s the appeal?”

“Are you planning on testifying, Dr. Lecter?”

“Do you think Will Graham will take the stand, Hannibal? Why is he so scared to face you?”

Someone shouts out, “Who are you wearing?” and the crowd laughs nervously, with a touch of disbelief. As if it defies probability that they should all be laughing here, at this moment, in the presence of Hannibal Lecter.

He doesn’t answer any of their questions, of course. He only smiles his sphinx’s smile and glides past.

Meanwhile Freddie is content to stay removed from the rest of the media. She climbs atop the hood of her van, and from this height she takes wide-angle shots of the whole scene: the steps, the crowd, the flashes, the microphones, and the man in the white suit at the center of it all.

Leonard Brauer comes careening out the courthouse’s front doors. “What is this? My client hasn’t convened a press conference!” When he sees Hannibal in his full finery, Brauer’s eyelids pull back wide. But he keeps his opinions to himself until they are safely through security.

“What the hell are you doing? Strutting in front of the photographers like somebody rolled out the red carpet!”

“Hard to strut in manacles,” observes Hannibal, as the courtroom guards unlock his chains and load him into the little holding cell.

“And yet you find a way.” Brauer shakes his head. “Nice suit. You look like the manager of a luxury brand car dealership in hell.”

Hannibal’s lips thin. “I’m about to go out on the world’s stage and be judged as either a monster or a madman. If I am to face justice then I wish to face it in my own skin.”

“This isn’t skin—this is couture! All I ask,” says Brauer, pacing in front of the bars, “all I ask—is for you to follow my lead, just a little bit. Why can’t you do that?”

Hannibal sits on the little bench in the holding cell with his head canted and his hands folded. A beam of sunlight glazes the back of his hair, catches on the gold threads of his magnificent suit.

“Mr. Brauer,” he says, pleasantly, but with an edge, “if you desire to win this case, then it’s my lead you have to follow now.”

For a moment Brauer only looks at him. Hannibal can see the man's instincts at war: his pragmatism launching increasingly devastating attacks against his professional experience. Finally pragmatism is victorious, as Hannibal knew it would eventually be. Brauer draws himself up straight.

"All right," he says, only faintly sarcastic. "Lead on."

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the (wrong version of the) truth.

The courtroom is long and low-slung, subterranean. Its dark walls, ribbed by curving slats of bleached wood, put into Hannibal's mind the image of a leviathan that has swallowed the room's occupants and is busily digesting them. He seeks out familiar faces among the swallowed:

There is Jack, expression so heavy it is nigh unreadable, his neck swiveling to maintain unbroken eye contact with Hannibal as the courtroom guards march him past the bar.

Sitting next to Jack is Beverly, who returns Hannibal's stare with courageous, and visible, effort. She has cut her hair. It is chin-length now, severe.

There is Dr. Chilton, surveying the gallery, angling his head proudly in case anyone in the gallery happens to be surveying him. He gives Hannibal an encouraging nod, and Hannibal feels almost wistful. Chilton won't be so encouraging when all of this is over.

There is Freddie, having traded her aviators for a churchgoing hat, still glowing from her stunt outside the courthouse. Arrayed around her are various of Hannibal's acquaintances from the many charity balls, concerts, and auctions that constituted his social life in Baltimore—and some of them attended his dinner parties, too. No doubt they are here to find out whom they ate. They stare at him in recognition, and in queasy horror engendered by that recognition. His sleek hair, his fashionable suit, his air of impervious pleasantness—he looks just like the man they knew and prattled with. But he's not, he can't be! With her gloved hands primly folded, Freddie listens to these scandalized whispers, memorizing every word.

The back wall is lined by video cameras, greedy lenses pointed, red lights on. The whole world is watching him.

The whole world—except Will. Hannibal didn't expect to see him here today, but he still feels a certain lightness leave him as he takes his seat beside Brauer.

They stand for the honorable Judge Wallis, who looks just as a judge should: magnanimous bearing, large-browed, silver-haired, with serious lines etched in his dark skin.

“He’s either really, really deadpan or he has no sense of humor whatsoever,” Brauer whispers to Hannibal. And then, “He’s *vegan*.”

The District Attorney for the State of Maryland is the lead prosecutor: Helen Weaver, a tall hard-faced woman with a mane of tight white curls. Her two assistants are younger women, both disarmingly lovely. One is blonde, the inquisitive jut of her jaw very reminiscent of Miriam Lass. The other has limpid eyes, a shining swath of dark hair, and a red scarf tied around her throat. Hannibal might otherwise dismiss these resemblances as accidental, but the scarf is too much. He twists in his seat and sees Jack Crawford attending his expression very closely. So Jack is not above theatrics either.

The DA rises to make the prosecution’s opening statement. She gets right down to business.

“Hannibal Lecter is a monster,” Helen Weaver declaims. “That is what the press would have you believe. They have made his name synonymous with evil, mythologizing him, and mythologizing the crimes he has been charged with. It is the prosecution’s goal to strip away that myth. As we establish our case, we will concern ourselves only with concrete facts: the physical evidence the federal investigation team has collected, and the unbiased interpretation of that evidence by experts in their respective fields.”

Weaver speaks with a melodious Alabamian accent, and adds to the musicality of her presentation by metronoming her fist against her palm.

“When you examine the evidence, it will become clear that Hannibal Lecter methodically executed his crimes, and conspired to hide his wrongdoing from the patients who depended on him and the friends who trusted him.”

Hannibal turns to note the expressions of said patients and friends, but Brauer, catching him, mouths, “Eyes forward.” For once Hannibal obeys his counsel. He transfers his eyes to the table, takes possession of one of Brauer’s legal pads, and begins to write.

“We will lead you through his operating pattern step by step,” continues Weaver, “and you will see the effort involved. The preparation. The sweat. This man worked hard to get away with what he did. And I have no doubt he’s going to work hard to get away with it in the weeks to come.”

Weaver turns to Brauer, and the two attorneys size each other up.

“The defense will argue this man is insane. That his crimes were the result of severe mental illness, and that when he committed them he was neither in control of his actions, nor was he aware of those actions’ consequences. But when you examine the physical evidence: the medication procured illegally through his psychiatric practice, the butchering equipment purchased with stolen credit cards so it wouldn’t be traced to him, the concealed freezer in his kitchen within which he preserved his victims’ mutilated bodies for his later cannibalization —and when you look at the gaps, the places in our case where no physical evidence can be said to exist, because Dr. Hannibal Lecter had the foresight to destroy so much of it before he

was finally exposed—when you combine these many facts, the sum total is a man aware of himself and everything around him at all times: before, after, and during the perpetration of his crimes. Hannibal Lecter escaped discovery for so many years because of how good he was at deceiving the people around him. Don't let him deceive you now."

Throughout this speech Brauer maintains his default, slightly jaunty, listening expression, but Hannibal sees the sweat beading on his lawyer's hairline. Brauer doesn't want to follow Weaver's performance. And he won't have to.

Hannibal pushes the legal pad to his right. For a moment Brauer only stares at it; then, swallowing his objections, he rises from his seat.

"Your Honor, the defense would like to reserve its opening statement until after the prosecution presents its case-in-chief."

Judge Wallis blinks down at him. "Your client pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity, Mr. Brauer. Are you sure you don't want to tell me how you plan to go about proving Dr. Lecter's actions were the result of illness? That would be the thing to do right about now."

Brauer chuckles nervously. "Yes, it would, it really would." He glances at Hannibal. "But, uh, I'm going to forego doing that for the time being."

The judge is dubious. "Burden of proof is on you, Mr. Brauer."

"Oh, I'm aware of that, Your Honor."

Wallis is the sort of man who brooks no fools, and can sense in an instant when he is being made one. He holds Brauer for one long moment with his eyes. "All right," he says, warningly. "Then you may call your first witness, Ms. Weaver."

The rest of the day is taken up with the testimony of Simon Gibbet, a trauma surgeon who attended medical school with Hannibal. Weaver uses Dr. Gibbet to establish Hannibal's surgical skill-set and match that skill-set to the mutilation of the bodies. Weaver proves to be a perspicacious questioner who hammers out her points in niggling detail. She is emphatic, exacting—and *dull*.

Brauer has to shake himself out of a stupor for cross-examination. It starts well enough, with Brauer prodding Gibbet to admit that while a surgeon of Hannibal's caliber must have mutilated the Chesapeake Ripper's victims, it doesn't prove this surgeon was Hannibal.

Judge Wallis is confused. "Mr. Brauer, are you arguing that someone other than your client committed these murders? Must I remind you again that your client pleaded insanity?"

Brauer discharges a painful grin. "Just sticking to the facts, Your Honor, same as Ms. Weaver. I don't want to see the prosecution making any assumptions about my client that aren't based on the material evidence they say they're so fond of. Dr. Lecter has been charged with fifty-nine counts of first-degree murder, and not all of those murders can be linked to him."

“Should have said that in your opening,” Wallis remarks in his deadpan voice, then blinks in stern surprise at the chuckles scattered in the gallery.

Next Brauer attempts to use Dr. Gibbet as a character witness, with mixed results.

“Everybody at Hopkins liked Hannibal,” says Gibbet, as he looks anywhere but in Hannibal’s direction. “It didn’t matter how busy he was; he’d always put down whatever he was doing to consult on your case if you needed help. Never saw him tired, never saw him break down, not even during residency. He was like a rock. Probably the sanest man I know.”

“The sanest man he knows!” Brauer paces in front of the bars of the holding cell, as Hannibal awaits transportation back to the Baltimore State Hospital. “That’s great, that’s just super.”

“I haven’t spoken to Dr. Gibbet in almost twenty years.”

This is no consolation to Brauer. “The only person in that courtroom who looked insane today was me. Why did you agree to the insanity plea if you won’t let me argue for it?”

Hannibal leans the back of his head against the wall and shuts his eyes. “All in good time,” he says.

Brauer scoffs. “This isn’t eighth grade chemistry, Dr. Lecter. You don’t have to pass me little notes. You tell me what you want ahead of time, and we won’t get blindsided out there.”

Hannibal says nothing, as intractable as the bricks behind him. But Brauer is intractable too, amusingly so, which is part of why Hannibal continues baiting him.

“When I joined your three-ring circus,” Brauer says, an ultimatum in his voice now, “I didn’t agree to be the clown.”

One of Hannibal’s eyes slits open, revealing to Brauer its darkened gleam. “We don’t choose our roles, Mr. Brauer. We only play them.”

Over the following days, the prosecution unfolds their case one tedious expert after the next. Experts in osteology, experts in PCR analysis, forensic accountants to trace the shadowy paths of Hannibal’s money, experts in trace metals, in pharmacology, in food science. The charged mood in the gallery dissipates, extinguished by the dryness of the facts. Meanwhile Brauer listens to these testimonies with his chin in his hands, sometimes not even bothering to cross-examine.

“They’re trying to bury us under a mountain of evidence,” he grumbles to Hannibal. “And it’s working.”

Hannibal keeps himself entertained with his legal pad, upon which he captures the likenesses of the witnesses, the prosecution team, the courtroom staff, and the judge. Back at the Baltimore State Hospital he passes these sketches to Freddie, who auctions them off on eBay. The proceeds, she assures TattleCrime's readership, will be donated at Hannibal's request to charities that combat world hunger.

Between this and his fashion choices, Hannibal still commands the public's ravening attention. The front page of every major newspaper has a sidebar dedicated to him, and the trial remains grist for the mill of cable news punditry despite its stultifying nature. So popular is the courtroom live stream that it regularly overtasks TMZ's servers.

Saturday Night Live airs a parody in which the trial proceedings are repeatedly interrupted by the comedian playing Hannibal, who changes his clothing every few minutes, from a lime-green tuxedo to a sailor suit to a ruffled gown with a headdress made of tropical fruit, capping off his antics by gnawing on a turkey leg with a plastic human foot attached. "Insipid," Hannibal observes to Freddie through a smile full of teeth.

Ten days into the trial, Helen Weaver finally brings an end to the tedium.

"The People call Beverly Katz."

The door opens and Beverly enters the courtroom. The gallery crane their necks. Freddie's gloved fingers drum the bench in front of her. Jack draws a galvanizing breath. Hannibal sets aside his sketch and dedicates all his attention to the stand, where Beverly is being sworn in.

"So help me God," she repeats after the court registrar, her voice all throat. Her straightened hair falls in slashes around her face, the unforgiving geometry echoed in the hard lines of her blazer. In this, her chosen armor, Beverly looks older and formidable in her way.

Ms. Weaver begins by asking her to affirm her credentials and establish her role as a member of the Chesapeake Ripper and Hobbs Copycat investigations. Beverly answers every question with an able, by-rote seriousness. She is no stranger to courtroom testimony, but her past appearances only required her to speak in the capacity of a forensic expert, detached and clinical. If Beverly is to condemn Hannibal today, then she'll have to venture a great deal closer in than that.

"Agent Katz," says Weaver, "how did you come to meet the accused?"

Beverly looks right at Hannibal, her stare controlled, prolonged, iron-plated. In return Hannibal smiles at her using only his eyes, and Beverly has to look away.

"Dr. Lecter consulted on a number of cases for the Behavioral Analysis Unit," she says to the room at large. "He helped us construct some psychological profiles."

“And when did you first become suspicious of him?”

“After Will Graham was arrested. At that point Dr. Lecter had been Will’s psychiatrist for five months, yet he somehow failed to notice his patient had developed a life-threatening case of encephalitis. Then once Will recovered and started making accusations, Dr. Lecter stuck around, which I thought was pretty strange behavior for a medical professional in his position. He continued treating Will and consulted with the FBI more frequently than ever.” Her eyes flash. “None of it sat right with me.”

“Did you share your concerns with anybody?”

She nods. “With Jack Crawford. He responded by sending me to interview Dr. Lecter to see if there was any truth in what Will was saying about him.”

“And how did Dr. Lecter respond to questioning?”

“He had alibis for each of the Copycat murders that all held up to cursory investigation. Dr. Lecter was very apologetic about what happened with Will; he told me the reason he was still Will’s doctor was because he was trying to make up for his mistakes. Basically he said all the right things to me that day. He had an answer for everything.”

Bitterness seethes beneath Beverly’s poker face.

Weaver prompts, “But you were still suspicious?”

“The whole thing left a bad taste in my mouth if I’m honest, but I’m a scientist.” Beverly lifts her chin. “I make conclusions based on the facts I’ve got. And in this case the facts supported Dr. Lecter’s version of events.”

“So what facts made you change your mind?”

Now Beverly describes the series of events that finally led her to believe Will’s story. She tells the court of the documents she found connecting Hannibal to several of the Chesapeake Ripper’s victims: hospital logs, customer lists, and purchase orders, all with his name on them.

“These documents constitute Exhibit Thirty-Four, Your Honor, which has already been entered into the record.” Weaver indicates a stack of papers on the evidence table. “What did you do with the information you uncovered, Agent Katz?”

“I thought Jack Crawford would dismiss what I’d found as too circumstantial.” Beverly glances at Jack in the gallery, who gives her a nod of support. “So I showed it to Will instead. He told me his side of the story, the whole thing from start to finish, and I came out of that conversation thinking his version of events was unbelievable but undeniable. There wasn’t enough evidence for me to act on yet, but there was enough to start building a case.”

“So what did you do next, Agent Katz?”

“Started building a case.”

Beverly's pluckiness brings out many smiles in the gallery.

"You assisted Will with his independent investigation," clarifies Weaver.

"Yes."

Beverly takes them through that investigation, describing her methods of evidence gathering and her escalating fears that Hannibal had caught wind of her efforts.

"Did the accused ever threaten you in any way?"

"Not in so many words. He started commenting on my perfume, telling me I looked tired, that I was overexerting myself on cases, that kind of thing. He invited me over for dinner once. Needless to say, I didn't accept."

The crowd hums with amusement. They have warmed to Beverly, brave Beverly, the steadfast scientist on the hunt for the truth. Even serious Weaver is exhibiting signs of a smile.

Hannibal chooses this moment to rearm himself with pen and legal pad. Brauer rolls his eyes so hugely he is in danger of pulling a muscle, but he lets Hannibal write without interruption.

Beverly tells the court her hypothesis that Hannibal was keeping physical evidence in a refrigerated storage facility in West York, Pennsylvania, and describes the manner in which she came into possession of what she believed was the key to unlock Hannibal's unit there. Her account of Will's assault on Hannibal is heavily sanitized, as Weaver steers Beverly away from saying anything that portrays Will as bestial or brutal. One would think, listening to Beverly now, that Will had only grabbed Hannibal and given him a teeny nibble.

Then Beverly describes that fateful, fatal confluence of events: when Alana arrived at the Baltimore State Hospital subbasement before sunrise and there discovered Beverly and Will conspiring to raid Hannibal's storage unit. And although Beverly's composure remains tightly rooted, Hannibal can hear the strain in her voice as she recounts how Alana demanded the return of the stolen key; how Beverly handed it over thinking Alana would give it back to Hannibal, only to find out later that Alana had instead used the key to open Hannibal's hidden abattoir; how she exposed his secrets and bought back Will's freedom, paying for it with her life.

The gallery absorbs this story with an avaricious silence, their eyes as bright and steady as the red lights of the cameras. Distasteful. Hannibal gives the hoi polloi a look of ice, and as he does so, he catches Jack doing just the same. For a moment their eyes lock, united by their loyalty to the dead—then Jack looks away.

The prosecutor finishes her questioning. Beverly's hair curtains off her face as she stares at her knees. No doubt she is using this brief respite to try to tamp down on her emotions, on her guilt, the disquieting awareness of the crowd watching her, the disquieting awareness of Hannibal watching her.

"Your witness," Weaver tells Brauer.

And Brauer, almost against his will, angles his head at Hannibal, a silent invitation. Immediately Hannibal slides the legal pad along the table, having filled the top page from margin to margin with his impeccable cursive. Brauer reads the first few words and his reluctance melts away. He takes the pad up to the stand, reading as he walks. With every step his eyebrows lift.

Beverly looks between the legal pad and Hannibal's face, where a phantom smile lingers, and steels herself.

Judge Wallis watches Brauer from over the top of his eyeglasses. "When you're finished with your novel, Mr. Brauer, then perhaps you'd like to question the witness?"

"Yes, Your Honor." But Brauer poses his first question with his eyes still on the pad, as if its yellow depths are far more interesting than anything Beverly can tell him.

"Agent Katz, if you don't mind, I'd like to rewind back to those documents you were telling us about: the medical files and shopping receipts with Dr. Lecter's name on them." Brauer's voice is smooth and ever-so-slightly ingratiating. "You uncover these records and they're enough to convince you that Will Graham's story is worth investigating. But you don't use them to open an official investigation. You don't show them to Jack Crawford. Why the secrecy?"

Beverly squares her shoulders, voice strong. "As I already told the prosecutor, I was concerned Jack Crawford would consider what I'd found to be too circumstantial to investigate officially."

Now Brauer looks up. His smile does nothing to hide the acuity of his gaze. "Was there any reason why you might have been *afraid* to show Agent Crawford what you'd found?"

She raises her eyebrows. "Afraid? No."

"Isn't it true that Agent Crawford was close friends with Dr. Lecter?"

Brauer strikes just the right note between innocence and insinuation, but Beverly isn't falling for it.

She says, cagily, "I can't say how close they were."

"But you can't deny they *were* friends."

She shrugs a little aggressively. "They were friendly."

"Were you concerned Agent Crawford might shut you down to protect Dr. Lecter?"

"I just thought—I thought Jack lacked perspective on this particular case." Beverly looks pained at having to admit even this much. Faultlessly loyal to Jack, as always. "We had already vetted Dr. Lecter; we'd cleared him of suspicion on the Copycat case. Jack's mind was made up about him."

Brauer ambles closer to the stand, a look of artful concern on his face. “Agent Katz, I have to ask…did you *hide* these documents from Jack Crawford because you were afraid he might tip off Dr. Lecter about them?”

“Objection, Your Honor,” says Weaver, standing. “Agent Katz’s opinion of how her superior might have reacted in a hypothetical situation is irrelevant and beyond the scope of this questioning.”

Brauer swoops. “I’d say the conduct of the lead investigator of the case against my client is very relevant, Your Honor, and completely within this trial’s scope. Maybe that scope is just a little wider than the prosecution would like to admit.”

“All right, Mr. Brauer, you can stop editorializing,” Judge Wallis says. “The objection is overruled. Agent Katz, please answer the question.”

Beverly is looking past the bar to Jack in the gallery. She speaks slowly, carefully, feeling out every word for a snare. “I was worried if I showed the documents to Jack, Hannibal Lecter might find out about their existence.”

Brauer pushes harder. “Because Agent Crawford might *tell him* about their existence.”

“Dr. Lecter was consulting on the Chesapeake Ripper case. He was privy to all the information related to it. So yes,” she sighs, looking an apology over at Jack, “I thought there was a possibility that Jack would reveal what I’d found to Dr. Lecter. A *slim* possibility. But still…it was the only evidence I had. I couldn’t take the risk.”

In the gallery Jack’s eyes are half-lidded, his bearing apologetic. With utmost dignity he endures this public chastening.

“A tough situation, without a doubt.” Brauer gives the witness box an amiable little pat. “Couldn’t trust your boss! But why not just go further up the ladder, Agent Katz? Show the documents to someone else?”

A crease between her brows. “I didn’t think anyone would believe me. The Bureau had such a strong case against Will.”

“And the evidence you found was too circumstantial to change their minds.”

“That’s right.”

“Just too *circumstantial*.” Brauer has begun putting particular emphasis on this word. “Too *circumstantial* to convince anyone but you. Why you, and nobody else?”

The crease between Beverly’s brows deepens. Weaver hastily issues an objection, citing the vagueness of Brauer’s question, and this time the judge sustains it. But Brauer isn’t deterred.

“Agent Katz,” he says, brightly, “how would you describe your relationship with Will Graham?”

Beverly blinks, a little whiplashed by the change in topic. “He’s my colleague and my friend.”

“Your colleague *and* your friend. And even before his arrest, you liked him? You trusted him?”

“I liked him.” Beverly’s voice strengthens. “I thought he was a brilliant investigator, and a good person—a good person who had been dealt the worst hand imaginable, but still a good person. I wanted to trust him. But when the evidence seemed to be against him, I had to accept that.”

“Like the dedicated scientist you are,” Brauer oozes. “But then you found evidence that supported his side of the story, and your opinion changed. Let me ask you this, Agent Katz. If you were working on an investigation that involved a person with whom you shared no familiarity whatsoever, a complete stranger, and you came across these documents—just these documents—a hospital admissions log and a few shopping receipts, would that really be enough to convince you of somebody’s innocence?”

Beverly watches Brauer out of the corners of her eyes. She sees what he’s doing, and as much as she would like to resist his drift, she is simply too honest, too matter-of-fact, to equivocate.

“Probably not,” she admits.

“So you were predisposed to believe what Will Graham told you, because he was your friend.”

“I was at least willing to give his story a shot.” The softest uplift, a defensive note in Beverly’s voice.

“Because he was your friend,” insists Brauer. “Agent Katz, there’s nothing wrong with admitting friendship influenced your decision-making here. It doesn’t negate the validity of the evidence you’ve gathered, and it certainly doesn’t detract from the trustworthiness of your testimony. I’m only trying to get the full picture of your involvement with Will Graham. You weren’t just an impartial scientist acting on some evidence you found. You were Will’s friend, and you wanted to help him.”

“Will was facing the *death penalty.* Of course I wanted to help him if I could.”

“You’d made up your mind about him,” Brauer observes, evenly, “just as Jack Crawford had made up his mind about Hannibal Lecter.”

Beverly is nettled. “I hadn’t made up my mind,” she says. “I couldn’t believe Will’s story without the existence of hard evidence to back it up. That’s why I went looking for it—”

Brauer interrupts her smoothly. “—in Hannibal Lecter’s house.”

This brings Beverly up short. “What?”

“You were looking for evidence in Hannibal Lecter’s house. That’s why you entered it without a warrant on the night of”—Brauer checks the legal pad—“September 18, while Dr.

Lecter was out enjoying *Tristan and Isolde* at the Baltimore Opera House."

"I didn't have enough evidence for a warrant."

Brauer gives the legal pad a delighted little shake. "So you admit you were trespassing in Dr. Lecter's residence that night?"

Beverly's eyes flash to the prosecutor, not so much asking for help as she is determining how big of a tactical error she has committed. And indeed Weaver looks displeased, though she makes no objection to this line of questioning.

So Beverly is forced to answer. "Will Graham asked me to gain entry to Dr. Lecter's house while we knew he was out. I was looking for potential places where he might have been concealing hard evidence."

A showy frown from Brauer. "But without a warrant, nothing you found in Dr. Lecter's house would have been admissible in court."

"It wasn't a judge we were trying to convince; just Jack. We needed to change Jack's mind, find evidence so incontrovertible he'd have to believe Will's story."

"You were breaking the law," Brayer says, without inflection.

"It was a last resort approach that put me in a lot of danger. I wasn't happy about it."

"And it didn't work out that well for you, huh? Did you find anything in Dr. Lecter's house that night?"

"No," she says. "Well, I found a bill from the storage rental facility in West York. That's what brought the existence of Dr. Lecter's unit to my attention."

"Which you also broke in to. After performing an illegal search on my client while your friend, Will Graham, was taking a *bite* out of him."

Beverly says nothing to this. Brauer doesn't expect her to. Instead he asks, "Why did you really break into Dr. Lecter's house that night?"

She stares at him. "I just told you."

"To look for evidence you couldn't use, and didn't find." With two fingers Brauer caresses his chin, faux-thoughtful. "But that can't be the whole story. Just look at the facts, Agent Katz. You told no one what you were doing. You broke into my client's house, stole his keys, searched his storage unit. Your friend Will Graham *assaulted* him. I mean, was this a criminal investigation, or an intimidation campaign?"

His words are doing the trick; they have provoked an incredulous smile from Beverly. "I doubt anything we did *intimidated* Hannibal Lecter."

"But you can't know that. My client perceived what you and Will Graham were doing as harassment, an attempt to push him towards desperate action. Action he was finally forced to

take."

"We didn't force him to do anything." Beverly couldn't sound more dismissive. "We weren't entrapping Lecter; we were investigating him, trying to find evidence we could use against him."

Brauer's face has hardened. "You're saying 'we' a lot."

"Excuse me?"

"*We*," Brauer enunciates. "*We*, Agent Katz."

"We, as in Will and I," she says, tart but unnerved.

"Will and you. Tell me more about Will and you. How did you know the true purpose of your 'investigation'? Was it Will Graham who told you what to do, and why you were doing it? How can you be sure you weren't unknowingly engaged in an attempt to bait my client and drive him towards murder?"

She shakes her head. "That wasn't what was happening."

"That's what Will Graham told my client was happening. But he told you something different, and you believed him, because you believed everything Will Graham told you, no questions asked."

"I asked plenty of questions," says Beverly, a pulse of real anger in her voice. "And not for a second do I believe Will told Lecter he was trying to entrap him—I suppose you only have Lecter's word for that ever happening—"

Brauer talks over her. "Will asked you to enter Dr. Lecter's house without a warrant, and you did it. Will asked you to steal a key out of Dr. Lecter's pocket, and you did it. Will asked you to break into Dr. Lecter's storage unit, and you did it. You're some friend, Agent Katz." He enunciates his next words with relish. "True blue."

"I was trying to catch a very active, very intelligent serial killer." Beverly thrusts a finger out at Hannibal. "*That* serial killer. He had weaseled his way on to his own investigation, he was all over everything we did at the BAU, so yes, we—*Will and I*—had to fall back on under-the-table measures."

"But just how far under the table did you fall?" Brauer's eyes kindle a predatory flame. "How about you tell us who attacked you on the morning of September 20? You remember September 20, don't you, Agent Katz? I hope you do. You sustained a blow to the head that night, in addition to a dislocated shoulder, both from an unknown assailant. And since this was the same night the Chesapeake Ripper was out on a killing spree, you let the FBI believe your attacker was that very killer. But you weren't attacked by the Chesapeake Ripper, were you?"

"No." Beverly sounds like the words are being dragged out of her. "I gave myself those injuries."

Gasps from the gallery. Hannibal smiles.

“I wanted Jack to think the Chesapeake Ripper had attacked me, because I knew he’d assign a security detail to everyone on the investigation team, including Dr. Lecter—”

But Brauer steamrolls her. “You faked an assault. You lied, so that in the middle of a crime spree your agency would misallocate an entire security detail.”

“It wasn’t misallocation! They were protecting people, just not the person they were assigned to protect. Why don’t we talk about the fact that Dr. Lecter *killed* both those agents—”

But Brauer steers Beverly away from Hannibal’s transgressions and back to her own. “As a technician in the Quantico crime lab, you have access to all physical evidence connected to active investigations, don’t you?”

She blinks hard, whiplashed again. “Yes.”

“You had access to the evidence the FBI collected from the Ripper murders and the murders attributed to the Garret Jacob Hobbs copycat? Skin samples, hair, that kind of thing?”

“Yes.”

“You take any of those samples with you to Dr. Lecter’s house when you broke in on the night of September 18?”

She stares at him for a moment, too shocked to answer. “…No?”

“Did Will Graham ask you to plant any evidence in Dr. Lecter’s house that night?”

Her face twists contemptuously. “No.”

Brauer is rattling off questions like machine-gun blasts.

“When you left his house, did you leave anything behind?”

“*No*. I would never do that.”

“How long were you inside Dr. Lecter’s house, Agent Katz?”

“About forty minutes.”

“About forty minutes. Isn’t that enough time to plant samples inside Dr. Lecter’s house?”

“I wouldn’t know, as I didn’t plant any.”

Brauer ticks off the damning evidence on his fingers. “You had access to DNA samples that would link whoever possessed them to the crimes you were convinced Dr. Lecter had committed. You’ve already admitted you had no qualms about breaking the law if it led to his capture. You had opportunity, Agent Katz. You had motive—your friend behind bars with his large sad eyes pleading for your help—”

Beverly is getting angrier and angrier. “Oh give me a break—”

“—that same friend you seem incapable of ever telling ‘no.’ Oh, you're some friend, Agent Katz. True blue. True true blue. You lied for Will, you trespassed for Will, you stole for Will, you perverted the course of justice for Will, and yet, Agent Katz, you expect us to believe that planting evidence for Will was just one step too far for you?”

“Yes!”

Weaver, dismayed, has been signaling for the past minute for Beverly to stop engaging with Brauer. But Beverly is not one to shy away from a fight.

“What exactly are you accusing me of?” she asks, with an angry smile. “Is your argument that I secretly installed a walk-in freezer full of bodies in Dr. Lecter’s kitchen while he was at the opera?”

Brauer smiles back ruefully. He knows that by asking these questions, Beverly is doing his work for him. “I’m not accusing you of anything, Agent Katz. I’m only suggesting you would have had time to add some things to that freezer—

“That’s not what happened.”

“—to leave traces of human DNA on Dr. Lecter’s appliances, use your forensic expertise to, ah, shall we say, *elaborate* on the crime scene—”

“That’s not what happened!”

“You’re a scientist, Agent Katz. You deal in hard evidence. Got any hard evidence to prove that’s not what happened?”

Stone silence. And suddenly Beverly is looking at Hannibal, as if she actually expects him to corroborate her version of events. He tilts his head at her, like a lizard appreciating a sunbeam, and Beverly looks slapped.

Meanwhile Brauer has launched into declamation mode, his voice ringing off the ceiling. “The prosecution has spent the past ten days titillating us with over a hundred different exhibits of physical evidence, but how can we be sure, with you tramping all over his place of residence, that my client is the person responsible for any of those samples being found where they were found?”

“Because,” says Beverly, deadly-voiced, “I am telling you under oath that *I didn’t tamper with them*.”

“Well,” chirps Brauer, “we’ll just have to take your word for it, huh? No more questions, Your Honor.”

And he leaves Beverly sitting on the stand, mouth agape, eyes furious, her fists tight in her lap.

“Thank you, Agent Katz,” the judge says, not unkindly. “You’re dismissed now.”

But Beverly stays frozen in her seat. Again she looks at Hannibal, as if checking with him that what just happened really happened. The corners of Hannibal's mouth crease and darken, and whatever blood is left in Beverly's face drains away.

Brauer cackles.

"Didn't know what hit her! One of the FBI's top experts with her mouth just hanging open." He holds the legal pad up like a college graduate posing with his diploma. "I'm thinking I should get this framed. Now, do I wish you'd told me sooner about Beverly Katz trespassing in your house and cooking up her own assault? Of course I do. But what a rush, putting that together on the fly. What a *rush.*"

He turns to Freddie, who is standing next to him with her arms folded at the same ironic angle as her wide-brimmed hat.

"You know," Brauer says to her, starry wonder in his voice, "we could give the FBI absolute hell over this. Using Katz's little whoopsie as our base, we start questioning their motives, their ethics, the whole atmosphere of mistrust and paranoia that Jack Crawford fostered inside his division. The FBI doesn't see this trial as law and order. It's *damage control*. Their case is rickety, their investigation methods a mess, meanwhile here's Hannibal Lecter exploiting and exposing their own incompetence. So what do they do? They throw the book at him to draw attention away from their own mistakes!"

Freddie is not as enraptured by this new strategy as Brauer is. He notices, and asks her acidly, "Shouldn't you be recording this?"

She gives him a hard smile. "Kind of a distraction, isn't it? Even if the FBI is rotten to the core, it doesn't change the fact that Hannibal Lecter actually is a serial killer who eats people. And as the judge loves reminding you, you entered an insanity plea. What exactly does institutional corruption have to do with Hannibal's mental state?"

Hannibal, who is lying on his cot with his hands behind his head, finally lends his voice to this discussion.

"In my experience, it is far easier to implicate someone in a crime if that person has been mentally compromised. Perfectly sane people tend to notice when they're being set up."

For a moment both Freddie and Brauer only stare at him.

Then Brauer brays a laugh. "Well, there you go," he says to Freddie. And then to Hannibal, with a cringe, "Uh, please don't say that in court."

Freddie raises a very incredulous eyebrow. "So now you're claiming you didn't commit the murders?"

"I might not have committed all the murders I've been accused of."

She shakes her head in awe. “Hannibal Lecter, the victim of a vast government conspiracy. You framed Will Graham; now the FBI is framing you.”

“A case could be made,” he says, lightly.

Freddie looks both disgusted, and also on the verge of laughing.

Brauer eyes her. “Why the attitude? Thought you’d love this one. Haven’t you run a thousand stories tearing down the false idol of Jack Crawford, mighty G-man?”

“I can’t deny Jack has it coming,” Freddie says. “Beverly Katz, on the other hand…”

“She *faked* her own assault!”

“To save lives.” Despite the apparent sincerity of her words, Freddie’s voice is sly and bright. “Seems to me you just shamed Beverly Katz for doing the right thing when no one else did.”

Brauer doubles over with angry laughter. “Oh, you’ve gotta be kidding me! Just when I was starting to like you, you become Miss High Horse!? Are you going on Nightline tomorrow as Freddie Lounds, expert on ‘doing the right thing’? Heaven help us all.”

“I’ll be going on Nightline as a criminal justice journalist, emphasis on ‘justice.’ I think Beverly Katz is a superlative agent of the law, and I respect her for risking her career, not to mention her life, in order to exonerate a man who was wrongfully incarcerated.”

“*Please*. We all know you think Will Graham is nuttier than a peanut farm!”

“That doesn’t mean he should be in prison for crimes he didn’t commit.” And then, in reaction to Brauer gaping at her: “Aww, what’s the matter, Lenny? Can’t handle it when I start playing your role?”

“My role?” huffs Brauer.

Freddie flourishes her fingers, all innocence. “Why, devil’s advocate, of course.”

After Brauer leaves, Freddie approaches the glass. “I see what you’re doing.”

“Tell me,” Hannibal says. Still lying in bed, he rolls on his side and props his head up on the heel of his hand to look at her. She smirks at the coquettishness of this pose.

“You’re placing Beverly Katz in the crosshairs, so that Will Graham will come a-running. It’s clever. And brutal. Very you.”

Hannibal doesn’t let the smile reach his eyes. “Beverly Katz placed herself in the crosshairs. Always so quick to come to Will’s aid. But this time she failed to recognize that she herself is

a liability.”

“Ah.” From underneath the wide brim of her hat, Freddie’s eyes shine. “Nothing’s ever your fault, is it?” Something like admiration in her voice. And before he can answer, "Beverly always comes to Will’s aid, now Will has to come to hers. So we’d better hope he’s as loyal to her as she is to him.”

And for the very first time Hannibal finds himself almost savoring the possibility of Will never coming back. Would it be worth Will’s continued absence from Hannibal’s sight, this torturous separation, if that separation were proof of Will’s disloyalty to Beverly? What if, when the fox hears the rabbit scream, it lies incurious and belly empty in its den?

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Talk shit, get bit.

Chapter Notes

I'd apologize for the long wait, but that's getting a little boring, so let's just skip to the good stuff. This chapter comes with its own prequel fic, Sideshow, which you may have already seen on my Tumblr. That story directly informs the goings-on here, so definitely check it out if you want some added depth (and some added Beverly).

Dig in.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

WITNESS ADMITS TO FABRICATING EVIDENCE IN LECTER TRIAL

COURTROOM SHOCKER: FBI AGENT FAKED RIPPER ASSAULT

DID THE FBI FRAME HANNIBAL LECTER?

WHAT A KATZ-TASTROPHY!

The press, with forks brandished, make a meal of Beverly. They describe her courtroom appearance as “flustered,” “defensive,” and “unappealing with a side of caustic.” Meanwhile her testimony is dismissed as “convoluted,” “contradictory,” and “when taken in totality, unconvincing.”

Speculation runs rampant through the blogosphere that Beverly might have sabotaged the prosecution's case deliberately. Could she have a bone to pick with the FBI for arresting her friend? Or perhaps for arresting her professional ascent, giving more credence to the findings of her (white male) co-workers than to her own valuable discoveries? Legal experts examine whether chain of custody was broken for the evidence to which Beverly had access, and criticize the district attorney for putting her on the stand at all given her "personal attachments."

Said personal attachments are the primary obsession of those tasseomancers who frequent celebrity gossip sites. They wonder whether Beverly's willingness to risk her life and job for her "so-called 'friend'" had anything to do with "his dreamy blue eyes." Much is made of Will's brief stay at Beverly's apartment the year before. People Magazine reprints a grainy photo taken from this period: Beverly and Will on the porch steps outside her building. Will's face, tucked down into his scarf, looks plainly haggard, the skin under his eyes purple and sunken. Meanwhile Beverly, aware of the photographer, wraps a protective arm over the hunch of Will's shoulders. Hannibal spends half an hour studying this picture, but ultimately decides against clipping it.

There is one conscientious objector to the media assault: Freddie Lounds. TattleCrime's treatment of Beverly is at all times fair and balanced. While Freddie doesn't sugarcoat her poor performance ("Someone should have informed Katz that constant denials are as good as any confession"), she also calls Hannibal "a master DJ remixing the truth to party beats," and of Leonard Brauer, says only: "his jackets should each come with a slit in the back so Hannibal Lecter can more easily operate his dummy."

"Stop. Talking. To. Her," is Brauer's comment on the matter. "How many times do I have to say it? Freddie Lounds has her own agenda here, she always has, and at some point it's gonna diverge from ours."

Some commentators speculate that Beverly's testimony has plunged Jack Crawford so deep in the hot water he won't surface to testify. But apparently the D.A. believes Jack can handle himself, or else that his absence from court would do more harm than good, because on the following Monday Helen Weaver calls him to the stand.

Jack cuts a brave figure in his suit with its quietly stylish peak lapels and deep red Balthus-knotted tie. He folds his hands in his lap and squares his shoulders, at once respectful of the court before him while also holding true to his uncrushable pride. His eyes roam the gallery, staring down the leering rubbernecks and the grave-faced victims' representatives alike. Beverly is not in court today (no doubt back at Quantico licking her wounds) but Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller are both present in support of Jack, as is Kade Prurnell of the Office of the Inspector General—although judging by Prurnell's frosty demeanor, support for Jack is not the message she is trying to convey.

Jack takes them all in, his gaze opaque when it lands on Freddie, who watches him with her gloved finger contemplatively circling her bottom lip.

The only eyes Jack won't meet are Hannibal's. Jack isn't avoiding him out of fear, but because Jack doesn't feel it worth his time to engage. Hannibal smiles at this.

Both sides have prepared for today accordingly. At Brauer's insistence Hannibal has given his attorney a full briefing of Jack's many mistakes and misdeeds. But before Brauer can kick off the mudslinging, Helen Weaver tries to get ahead of them by confronting Jack herself.

"How would you describe your relationship with Hannibal Lecter?"

Jack takes a rumbling breath. "Dr. Lecter was my friend. He invited me into his home, he cooked for me. We'd talk for hours about our lives, the personal and the professional. Over time the barrier between the two became thin as silk. To me that seemed like the natural evolution of our friendship, and I welcomed it. I valued Dr. Lecter's opinion, whether it was about a case I was investigating or what gift I should buy my wife for her birthday. He had my full trust."

Weaver pauses, letting the tragic weight of this statement settle over the room. "Did Dr. Lecter ever ask you for favors or preferential treatment?"

Jack's answer is firm. "No."

"Did he ever ask you to assign him to any of your cases?"

"Only Will Graham's, after I tried to stop them from seeing each other. Dr. Lecter begged for one last chance at getting through to Will. Out of respect for his psychiatric expertise and out of regard for our friendship,"—a soupcon of regret in Jack's voice—"I went ahead and gave him that chance."

"So Dr. Lecter never explicitly asked to be involved in the Chesapeake Ripper investigation?"

"No. I asked Dr. Lecter to write a psychological profile on the Ripper. That was my idea." And then: "Not my best idea."

A few volleys of shocked laughter from the gallery.

"No," Weaver says, taken aback by her witness's almost breezy self-effacement. "No, it was not. Can you remember what sparked that idea?"

"A conversation with Dr. Lecter," Jack says, in a tone that plainly states, *What else?* "We were talking about the lack of movement on the Ripper case, the scarcity of viable leads and new theories, and Dr. Lecter suggested a fresh perspective might be helpful."

More laughter from the crowd. Jack takes it on the chin like a champ. Hannibal allows the skin around his mouth to crease; he is impressed by Jack's willingness to look the fool.

"Settle down," chides Judge Wallis, eyeing the gallery over the tops of his spectacles.

Weaver continues. "So you were discussing the Chesapeake Ripper investigation even before Dr. Lecter was officially consulting?"

“That’s right.”

“Did you often discuss cases with Dr. Lecter he wasn’t officially assigned to?”

“I did,” says Jack. “I shared details of active investigations with him on a regular basis, and on a number of occasions I let him tag along on interviews and crime scene visits without getting him the appropriate clearance first. Now, none of that is strictly against protocol, but I’ll admit it’s a gray area. With Will arrested, I needed someone trustworthy I could talk to, and Dr. Lecter fulfilled that role for me. Truth is, I’d grown dependent on his insight. So I bent the rules for him.”

Weaver gestures towards where Hannibal is sitting. “And Dr. Lecter bent the rules for you too, didn’t he? He had a habit of discussing Will Graham with you, even though he was Will’s psychiatrist and subject to physician-patient privilege.”

Jack doesn’t look where Weaver is pointing. Instead he looks at the judge. “Will wasn’t officially Dr. Lecter’s patient. They never formalized their therapeutic relationship.”

“Why wasn’t the relationship formalized?” Weaver asks.

“Will didn’t want it to be. He was leery of psychiatrists, suspicious of their professional interest in him, so this was the only way I could convince him to talk to someone qualified.”

Weaver presses, intent on holding Jack to full account before Brauer gets his chance. “And it was the only way you could be privy to the particulars of Will’s therapy, wasn’t it?”

“A nice side benefit,” agrees Jack, looking a little disgusted with himself. “The arrangement I made for Will with Dr. Lecter wasn’t unlawful, but you could call it… irregular.”

“An irregular arrangement for an irregular patient.”

“Non-patient,” Jack corrects her. “Look, my intention wasn’t to invade Will’s privacy. I was trying to keep him healthy while also keeping him working. My actions were intended to protect Will, but all they did was leave him exposed to illness and malicious influence. His therapy had no official oversight. As far as the Bureau knew, none of this was happening.”

“But you knew it was happening,” says Weaver, softly.

“I didn’t know enough,” says Jack, even softer.

Freddie’s eyebrows have risen so high they’ve vanished in her hair. Clearly she never thought she’d ever hear Jack express such contrition.

The crease around Hannibal’s mouth deepens. Jack’s contrition is sincere, and that’s what makes it masterful.

Weaver moves the story forward. “How did Will Graham’s arrest affect your friendship with Dr. Lecter?”

“Dr. Lecter understood everything I was going through. I had staked my reputation on Will being able to handle the work I gave him, but it looked like I’d misjudged his limits, and in misjudging them, I had destroyed his life. That was a hard truth to face. Dr. Lecter did everything he could to help me face it. He admitted he’d made mistakes with Will too; he’d missed the signs that Will’s illness might be neurological in origin, and I trusted him all the more for making that confession. It brought us closer.”

“How did you react when Will Graham first accused Dr. Lecter of framing him for the Copycat murders?”

Jack sighs. “I didn’t credit what Will told me. He was still suffering from encephalitis at the time. He was out of his mind, very out of his mind; when he was first brought in, he accused *me* of framing him. Seemed to me his was a paranoid delusion looking for a target, and eventually it found one in Dr. Lecter.”

“And later?” Weaver asks. “When Will’s encephalitis had cleared up, and yet he was still accusing Hannibal Lecter of murder, did you wonder then if maybe this was something more than a paranoid delusion?”

Jack spends a moment considering his answer. “I wondered. It’s my job to wonder. I assigned Beverly Katz to look into Will’s claims because as an investigator I have a duty to pursue every lead that comes my way regardless of my feelings about it. But did I personally believe what Will was telling me was true? No, I didn’t.”

“Why didn’t you believe him?”

“Because…” A longer pause now from Jack, as if he is pulleying words from a deep well inside him. “Because I’d already been wrong once. I’d made the mistake of believing my friend was incapable of murder—right up until the second when I found him in his home, with a victim’s blood underneath his nails and her ear disgorged in his kitchen sink. That’s a once-in-a-lifetime lapse in judgment right there, having someone close to me go so wrong without my knowing. I couldn’t believe I’d ever make that same mistake twice. I couldn’t believe that my friend, Dr. Lecter, was really the killer I’d been searching for. It was unthinkable. My friendship with Dr. Lecter prevented me from believing Will. My confidence in the firmness of my judgment prevented me from believing him. But I shouldn’t have been confident in my judgment. I had no right to be.”

The mighty shoulders slump, the proud head droops. The crowd gets a good look at the top of Jack’s head, his mottling hair now more white than gray. The great man prostrated before the masses, a god fallen off his cloud.

But slowly, oh so slowly, the lowered head swivels on the great neck until Jack’s face is once more revealed to them, and on that face a cold, hard, commanding stare levelled for the very first time in Hannibal’s direction.

For a moment they are locked in each other’s eyes. Silence. Then:

“Dr. Lecter,” Jack Crawford declares, “is a con artist. And a damned fine one too. But no matter how good a con artist he may be, he can’t operate without a sucker to con. And I—I

was that sucker. I was proud and I was reckless, I cut corners in pursuit of what I saw as meaningful justice, I took risks with my agents' well-being, I made them feel like they couldn't contradict me or come to me when they had problems. My misconduct made me susceptible to Dr. Lecter's manipulation. He wormed his way into my confidence, wormed his way into Will's head, and ultimately wormed his way onto his own investigation."

Jack looks out at the gallery, as if they are the jury sitting in judgment upon him.

"I know I've made mistakes. I'm not proud of them. I am sworn to protect people, but I couldn't protect the people closest to me. I chase evil men, but I failed to see the machinations of an evil man sitting by my side. I am responsible for all of those failures. I am responsible for creating the situations that Hannibal Lecter was so clever at exploiting. But I am not responsible for what Hannibal Lecter did. I'm not responsible for the murders he committed or the bodies he desecrated—"

"Objection," drawls Brauer. Until now Hannibal's lawyer has been content to watch Jack's performance from the sidelines, a disbelieving smile half-muffled on his face.

"Overruled," says the judge, eyes on Jack.

Weaver picks up the thread. "And you've seen firsthand the carnage Dr. Lecter leaves in his wake, haven't you?"

This is clearly a pre-rehearsed cue, because Weaver's assistant instantly fires up the digital projector, which sheds its unforgiving light on the screen next to the witness stand. For the room's edification, a crime scene photograph shot from above: a body lying on a tiled floor, hair spreading like spilt ink, blood oozing almost as dark out of the single stab wound in her chest. Only one of her eyes is visible, round and pale as a fish's.

"Can you identify the woman in this photograph, Agent Crawford?"

Jack turns in his seat, heavily, stormily, and for a long moment stares at the screen. In a voice without color he says: "Dr. Alana Bloom."

Click. Another photo, closer this time, the chest wound filling up the screen with blood.

"On the morning of September 22," Weaver intones, "is this how you found Dr. Bloom?"

"Local PD found her first, but this is what the scene looked like when I arrived."

Click. A close photo of Alana's torn fingernails.

"What were the circumstances in which you were summoned to Hannibal Lecter's house, Agent Crawford?"

Jack tells the court the full story: the unexpected phone call he received from Will still locked in his padded cell, Jack's tense drive over to Baltimore, the massacre waiting for him when he got there. Weaver accompanies Jack's testimony with more photographs: the two FBI agents lying in Hannibal's anteroom with their necks broken, Alana's blood-flecked shoe lying on its side; blood running through the grooves in the kitchen tiles; the boning knife in

its sheath of blood abandoned on the countertop; Alana's phone sitting inches from her stiff, outstretched hand; the beer glass knocked on its side; the two champagne flutes, one full, one empty, the empty one marred by a perfect handprint of blood; the blood-soaked kitchen towel; the bloody footprints leaving the scene, ending in a pair of Hannibal's shoes, left neatly lying by the sliding door to the patio.

As Jack describes this scene, he stares at Hannibal, daring him to react, to crack with remorse or self-pity or shame or sadness, to display a human reaction to this veritable onslaught of weighted fact. For Hannibal to refrain from an emotional reaction at this moment is to risk appearing monstrous.

Hannibal does not react. He looks placidly between the screen and Jack, holding each with his eyes for what seems the appropriate length of time. All the while he can hear his heartbeat, steady but deafening.

The description of the crime scene complete, Weaver returns to the prosecution table and retrieves a single sheet of paper. "Agent Crawford, please tell us what this is."

Jack takes the paper and gives it a cursory once-over even though he already knows what he holds. "This is the statement Will Graham made to me the morning after Hannibal Lecter's capture."

"Prosecution Exhibit Number 116," Weaver tells the judge. "Will you please read us the full statement, Agent Crawford?"

This instruction has a dramatic effect on Brauer, who folds forward and begins sucking his knuckle. Hannibal, who can feel Jack's eyes still on him, displays zero interest in this new exhibit, although he absorbs every word.

"Today is September the 23rd," reads Jack. "I am in Unit Director Jack Crawford's office in Quantico, Virginia, and my name is Will Graham. Yesterday morning at about 7 o'clock I received a call from Alana Bloom, who was phoning me from Hannibal Lecter's kitchen. She hadn't intended to call me; she was trying to reach Beverly Katz, but Beverly had given me her phone…"

The words are simple, bland, the fluorescent-lit language of good record-keeping, their speaker's emotion purged away by shock and protocol. Jack's voice, too, is purged, preternaturally even and slow.

"…Alana and I agreed to terminate our conversation to give her time to photograph the inside of Hannibal's locker before he could destroy any of the evidence there. Meanwhile I called Jack Crawford and alerted him to what was happening. When Alana called me back, it became clear to me that Hannibal was there with her, that he'd discovered Alana in the locker and taken her hostage. He walked Alana back to the kitchen and put the phone on speaker mode so we could all hear each other. Alana wasn't speaking much; she sounded like she was hyperventilating. I think Hannibal had a knife on her. When I asked him to let her go, he threatened to put the phone on hold…"

So tawdry to hear it all laid plainly out. The final scene of some pedestrian opera that, lacking beautiful music, must instead rely on pure shock.

"…He described the murder weapon to me, a six-inch straight boning knife held in his right hand. He told me he was approaching Alana from the left side. He said, 'Enjoy your freedom.' It was the last thing he said. Then Alana began to scream…"

Jack finishes reading the statement. In its wake, the courtroom is hollowed out with silence. Freddie's face has turned limestone white. Even Brauer's cocky expression has frozen solid.

Click. A professional photograph of Alana. Her hair falls in languid curls around her face, her gaze direct but warm, her smile charmingly earnest.

A collective intake of breath.

Jack looks grim but determined, a gravedigger almost finished with his hole. Hannibal meets his eyes, just as grim.

"Agent Crawford," says Weaver, in a quiet, infinitely respectful voice, "is Will Graham's witness statement consistent with the scene you saw that morning in Hannibal Lecter's kitchen?"

"Yes," says Jack.

"No more questions, Your Honor." Weaver takes her seat.

Jack turns to Brauer, face heavy, shoulders stiff with exhaustion—yet every line of his posture positively shouts out, *bring it on*.

Brauer looks a little cowed. He turns to Weaver's assistant. "Can you, uh, put that photo up again? The one of the whole, uh—of Dr. Bloom from head-to-toe, please?"

Click click click. Back through the photos they cycle, until they reach the shot of Alana's corpse splayed across the kitchen floor.

"Thank you," says Brauer. "Agent Crawford, how many of the Chesapeake Ripper's crime scenes have you visited?"

Jack thinks it over. "Seventeen."

"And what are some words you'd use to describe those scenes? Their, ah, overall effect?"

Jack looks dubious. "Gruesome," he says, flatly. "Elaborate. Theatrical. Will used to call them 'stage-managed.'"

"Stage-managed," repeats Brauer, rolling the word on his tongue. "Ok. So, looking now at this photo of Dr. Bloom, is that the word you'd use to describe her death: 'stage-managed'?"

Jack is obstinate as a donkey. "Yes."

Not the answer Brauer wanted to hear. "*This* is stage-managed?"

"Yes, it is."

Rather than pressing further, Hannibal's attorney tries another track. "Tell me, Agent Crawford: did the Chesapeake Ripper leave any footprints behind at the other crime scenes you visited?"

"No."

"He leave any handprints?"

"No."

"How about any DNA linking my client to any of those crimes?"

"No."

"But in the case of Dr. Alana Bloom, there were footprints present, correct? And handprints? Plus fingerprints and saliva on the wineglass and on the phone, fingerprints on the murder weapon, fingerprints on her, my client's blood under her nails, his DNA basically smeared across the entire kitchen, am I correct in saying that?"

"You are correct," says Jack, in a tone of voice suggesting this isn't a state Brauer often finds himself in.

"Now, considering the amount of DNA evidence left behind, would you describe the Lecter kitchen as being different in nature from the other crime scenes? Less stage-managed and more, uh, sloppily rendered, the result of intense emotion, violent passions and maybe even —desperation?"

Jack surveys Brauer through heavy lids. Then he turns and surveys Hannibal. A cold frisson between them.

"I would describe this murder as being *no* different in nature from the Chesapeake Ripper's other murders. She was stabbed through the heart, Mr. Brauer. Stabbed through the heart and left to die, with her friend on the phone by her ear. The phone, the drinks, the knife on the counter; those were props, Mr. Brauer. Props. It's not as elaborate as Dr. Lecter's other crime scenes, I'll give you that, but Dr. Lecter didn't have as much time to work with now, did he? It was a rush job, but it's still just as stage-managed as any of those other murders. Hannibal Lecter is the Chesapeake Ripper, and he punished Alana Bloom for what he deemed her disgraceful behavior. She trespassed where he told her not to go—rude behavior for a guest inside his home—so he killed her for her lapse in courtesy. This wasn't a crime of passion, Mr. Brauer. This wasn't temporary insanity. This was set dressing."

The words fall on Brauer like hammer blows. The attorney has finally understood what Hannibal understood as soon as he saw that first photo of Alana. Jack doesn't care whether or not his testimony strengthens the prosecution's case. He isn't trying to condemn Hannibal. No, Jack's aims are far more primal than that—Jack wants revenge. Jack is doing everything

in his power to make this personal, to make it ugly—to hit Hannibal where he hurts in the most public of settings. Jack has perceived that Alana is a weak spot. So he jabs and jabs and jabs.

Brauer needs to jab back.

Onto the legal pad Hannibal dashes off a single sentence and waves it at Brauer, who dutifully comes to collect it. He reads it, gives Hannibal the most microscopic of smirks, then returns to do battle at the witness stand.

"Agent Crawford," he almost singsongs, "your wife has *cancer*, doesn't she?"

EMILY STANTON, *MSNBC*: Blood on the floor today at the Lecter trial. Not literal blood—although for a minute there, when Jack Crawford's wife was mentioned…

ROCKY VARGAS, *CSPAN*: …A regular clash of the titans as Jack Crawford, already a controversial figure going into today's testimony, stood up to defense pressure and then went ahead and applied some of his own…

SHAZ APASHA, *Court TV*: …professional misconduct was again the defense's rallying cry, and you can't deny Leonard Brauer has a point when he makes those allegations. Whatever you think happened between Hannibal Lecter and the FBI, this is clearly a case of professional misconduct, professional misconduct up the wazoo…

RAQUEL RATCLIFF, *Inside Edition*: Woo boy, the moment when Brauer suggested Crawford might have been distracted on the job due to his wife's terminal cancer. Gloves were off! A clear conflict of interest there with Crawford allowing Dr. Lecter to accept his wife as a patient...

TRACEY LOMAX, *Fox News*: …Bringing Crawford's wife into the proceedings was A) disrespectful, B) irrelevant, as Helen Weaver objected multiple times to argue, and C) it was just a dirty move on the defense's part, a really dirty move…

JOE JACOBSON, *CNN*: But despite those few wobbly moments, Crawford's appearance today was nowhere near as disastrous and damaging as his colleague Beverly Katz's testimony last week. Crawford fought back hard against the defense's claim that the FBI planted evidence at Hannibal Lecter's property, and he redirected the focus back onto Lecter's crimes and the victims who suffered at his hand. Up until now the prosecution has restricted themselves to the material evidence, a dry and bloodless approach. But today's presentation marked a pronounced change in their tactics, with

that harrowing display of crime scene photographs featuring one of Dr. Lecter's most prominent victims…

GARY HUGHES, *NBC Nightly News*: Joining us again is TattleCrime's editor-in-chief Freddie Lounds, here to give us her insight in all things Lecter. Good evening, Freddie.

FREDDIE LOUNDS: Thanks for having me, Gary.

GARY: You've been following the trial from a closer vantage point than most of us and you had a lot to say last week when Beverly Katz's testimony left the prosecution in a weak spot. In your opinion, is Jack Crawford's testimony enough to get them back on track?

FREDDIE: The general consensus among my journalistic brethren is that Jack Crawford performed better today than expected—which I'll allow is probably true when you consider just how low Beverly Katz set the bar.

GARY: Sounds like you didn't find Crawford's testimony all that persuasive.

FREDDIE: Oh, it was persuasive all right, Gary. It persuaded me that Jack Crawford has an ax to grind with Hannibal Lecter, which isn't exactly the perception Helen Weaver should be courting when the defense has already been questioning the FBI's investigative practices. Crawford has a history of bias affecting his judgment, as he himself admitted today. This is the lead investigator on Lecter's case, and here he is outright demonstrating the mother of a grudge he's holding against the defendant. It's easy to picture Crawford mishandling evidence, pressuring witnesses, and playing loose with the truth, because that's just how desperate he is to see the state of Maryland execute Hannibal Lecter.

GARY: Hold on a minute, Freddie. Are you saying you actually believe Leonard Brauer when he says the FBI could have framed Dr. Lecter for some of the murders?

FREDDIE: Here's what I believe. Jack Crawford is supposed to be in the justice business, not the vengeance business. He's supposed to be objective here. Instead he's using tasteless images of a dead woman to emotionally bludgeon Lecter in front of the world's watching eyes. You've got to remember, Dr. Bloom was a close personal friend of both Crawford's and Lecter's. With that in mind, Crawford's treatment of her today was exploitative, insensitive, and dare I say it, downright icky—

"Attagirl," says Brauer, nodding away as he watches Hannibal's iPad through the glass wall of his cell. "'The vengeance business, not the justice business.' Love it."

Hannibal stops the video and puts the iPad down on his desk. "Reconsidering your opinion of Freddie Lounds, Mr. Brauer?"

The attorney shakes his head. "When she's good, she's very very good. But when she's bad, she's horrid. Truth be told, Dr. Lecter, I'm disappointed in our Freddie. In all her press appearances, she's neglected to mention the most significant aspect of Jack Crawford's testimony."

Hannibal is intrigued, but the gleam in Brauer's eyes discourages him from showing it too keenly. "And what aspect is that?" he asks, an idle question.

Brauer smirks like a cat with cream. It isn't often he notices something that has eluded even Hannibal. "Will Graham's witness statement," he says. "Pretty telling that Weaver had Jack Crawford perform that little dramatic reading for us."

"Will made the statement to Jack," Hannibal says. "And Jack was on the scene that day. He seems a natural choice for introducing that particular piece of evidence into the record."

"But why introduce it at all?" The gleam in Brauer's eyes brightens. "When you can get it straight from the horse's mouth? I hate to break it to you, Dr. Lecter, but that statement's appearance in court today all but guarantees Will Graham is going to be sitting this one out."

Out of Hannibal's memory palace, an image shakes loose: Jack Crawford on the stand, reading Will's statement. For just an instant, Jack looks up from Will's words and stares at Hannibal. Vicious triumph writ small in his eyes.

Hannibal folds his hands in his lap, regards Brauer with impenetrable politeness. "You're jumping to conclusions, Mr. Brauer."

"They won't call him." Brauer gives a sprightly don't-kill-the-messenger shrug. "They won't! Maybe they think they don't need him. Or that his testimony would just make things worse for them. I lean towards the latter. If I were you, Dr. Lecter, I wouldn't be too disappointed with this particular turn of events. We have the FBI running scared—we have the prosecution playing defense! You might not be seeing Will Graham in that courtroom, but what you will see *is a victory*."

TATTLECRIME.COM EXCLUSIVE:

"I'M THE ONLY ONE TRYING TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT"

Hannibal Lecter's Lover, and Final Victim, in Her Own Words

Introduction by Freddie Lounds

When we contemplate the sad case of Alana Bloom, our first thoughts are of those horrifying crime scene photographs so recently displayed in court: the matter-of-fact carnage on Hannibal Lecter's kitchen floor; the overturned designer shoe; the puddle of spilled micro-brew; the phone placed just out of reach of her fingers, her French manicure torn and spoiled; the blood spreading in every direction, blood in her hair,

> blood on her clothes, blood everywhere, blood and more blood. When we think of Alana Bloom, her blood is what we remember. But what of the woman herself?
>
> Dr. Alana Bloom was a prominent forensic psychiatrist and a respected professor at Georgetown University, a frequent contributor to the major medical journals and by all accounts a tireless advocate for her patients' well-being. For years she consulted with the FBI in its Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, where she became a close personal friend of both Will Graham and Jack Crawford. And, as the tabloids never fail to remind us, she was also Hannibal Lecter's longtime colleague, friend, and eventual paramour. Lecter, Graham, and Crawford were locked, at times without knowing it, in a deadly triangle, and Alana Bloom was that triangle's fulcrum, its steady center, the heavenly body the three men revolved around.
>
> But it isn't for me to tell you who Alana Bloom was. She can do that for herself, through the emails she sent in the weeks leading up to her tragic death: emails sent to Hannibal Lecter, to Jack Crawford, to Will Graham's trial lawyer Nigella Karim. In these messages, Dr. Bloom's acumen and ferocious willpower are both evident as she defends Graham's right to a fair trial, attacks Crawford for endangering Graham's delicate health, and questions Lecter's treatment methods, which she calls, "unconventional and unsafe." Meanwhile she confesses in emails to her parents and brothers her growing frustration over the increasing "incestuousness" of Graham's case, her mounting suspicions that all of the parties involved are being duplicitous with her, and finally, and most stirringly, her fear that her involvement in the case is only exacerbating a "potentially explosive" situation. It is unclear just how much Dr. Bloom knew about the man with whom she was intimate, but what is clear is that Bloom was no pushover. She was asking the right questions, in private if not in public.
>
> I feel it my duty to share these selections from her emails with the world…

Brauer, Hannibal admits, has a point. When Freddie is good, she is very, very good. But when she's bad…

The FBI slaps her with an injunction within the hour. Freddie takes the emails down in two. Alana's parents issue a statement begging the reading public not to seek out their daughter's stolen emails and to report the sites and users who repost them. But the screencaps have already been locally saved, the information disseminated, the intrusion unforgivable. And Freddie, when Hannibal summons her to his cell, is as interested in asking for forgiveness as she was in asking for permission.

"Helen Weaver and Jack Crawford are the ones who brought Alana into this. They made her death a public spectacle. Her emails are more than newsworthy. Far be it from me not to publish news."

Hannibal stands before her, feet apart, shoulders squared, transforming himself into a pillar of quiet anger. "You invaded Alana's privacy."

"She's dead. She doesn't mind."

"Her correspondents are very much alive."

“I think they can take it.” Freddie offers him a magnificent shrug. “I know you have protective feelings towards Alana. I respect that. But I wasn’t hurting her, Hannibal. I was *helping* her, don’t you see? The prosecution has been using her image to manipulate people. They’re exploiting her memory for their own gain. I’m trying to honor her. I’m giving Alana back her voice. She can speak for herself, you know she always could. Don’t you want to give her the chance to have her say?”

Hannibal takes a slow breath through his nose. “You used Alana Bloom as clickbait, and now you pretend to be her advocate.”

Something tightens in Freddie’s face. “I’m not the one pretending.”

The javelin of their stare is sharp on both ends.

“The dead are not for us to resurrect,” he says, in a voice of cold calm. “They are beyond our reach, Freddie, for good reason. From now on, I must insist you leave them out of my story.”

She takes a step closer to the glass. “It’s not your story, Hannibal. It’s *mine*.”

A moment of silence as Hannibal scrutinizes Freddie’s face, appreciates its combination of loveliness and vulgarity. He has enjoyed Freddie, but every enjoyment must have its end.

“If you won’t take my input into account before you publish,” he says, “then you won’t have it any longer. I’m removing you from my visitors list.”

Freddie can’t disguise her shock. “You’re…firing me? Over *this*?”

He merely looks at her, his expression stone.

“Your trial isn’t even half-over,” says Freddie, jaw jutting, eyes brightening, self-possession falling away. “You still need me to help people see things your way.”

“I don’t need you, Freddie. I never needed you. Our conversations have been illuminating, but you’ll find that light can only shine so far. That will be all.”

And he lies his long body down on the cot, the wall of his back turned upon her. Persistent Freddie stands there for a solid minute, pressing her relentless silence against him in an effort to change his mind. A lost cause if ever there was one.

“If that’s how it’s gonna be,” she sighs, “then I guess I’ll see you in court.”

Her stilettos rap, her leather pants creak, her long coat swishes as she stalks away, back to the wide outer world in which she is now a completely free agent.

In spite of it all, Hannibal is sorry to see her go.

Through the humming halls of his memory palace, as if circumnavigating an apiary of dreams. Tonight his intention is to visit his Sisleys and wade through the burbling streams of his teenage holidays in the south of France: a place, he acknowledges to himself, that Will is sure to appreciate should he be tempted to join Hannibal there. But Hannibal never reaches his Sisleys. Without choosing a painting or even entering a gallery, a memory blooms around him…

The rain runs in red beads down the windshield, the stoplight cloaking the road in a hematic mist. The interior of the Prius is jungle humid, and Hannibal feels even warmer; slow-roasted. Alana has draped his suit jacket over him like a blanket, and beneath it his muscles have melted and remolded to the seat. He is so happy.

They pass beneath a streetlamp, and within that lithium glow Alana turns to look at him. Her eyes are translucent. In their pale depths he sees her fondness for him and beneath the fondness, a question. But he is too boneless and complaisant to respond, the pain from the bite just sharp enough to remind him of its presence on his benumbed cheek. He shuts his eyes and basks in this: his invalid's cocoon of warmth, codeine, and other people's caring.

Alana looks back at the road, eyes fixed on the narrow corridor of light her headlamps carve through the darkness.

They walk up to the house under her umbrella, both of them pretending not to notice their FBI shadow slinking into the alleyway behind them. Alana wears his arm across her shoulders as she guides him over the threshold and conveys him up the stairs. He bows to her tender guidance, knowing this acquiescence is what she wants from him even as she must realize how uncharacteristic such behavior is: for Hannibal to be led without protest, positioned like a doll on his own bed, tucked in and pillows piled high at his back. He gives himself up to this helplessness and, to his surprise, finds it easy to do so. But when Alana straightens up to leave the room, he catches her wrist and whispers, "Stay."

"I'm just getting you some water."

"I don't want water." His fingers tighten around her pulse point. "I want you."

So she sits on the edge of the bed, watching him with the shadows of a smile. The arms of her blouse, he notices, are brown with his blood.

"You should rest," she says. "When did you last have a full night of sleep?"

His sleeplessness has become a matter of dispute between them. Rather than answer, he asks, "When did you?"

"I can't remember. It's like caring for a newborn. Feels like I'll never have an uninterrupted night's sleep again."

He tries to laugh, but it comes out a wince as his stitches pull. "No infant. Only Will, conspiring with the Chesapeake Ripper to deprive us of our hard-earned rest." And then, at

seeing the gravity of her expression, “Is he all right?”

Alana’s mouth tightens. “He’s still sedated. The orderlies moved him to a cell in the sub-basement. Maximum security. I’ll check on him in a little while.”

Hannibal thinks about Will physically confined, chemically restrained, spirited down, down, down beneath the surface of his mind, beneath the surface of the earth, where all lost things must sometimes go, if only to claw their way back up again.

“The good Dr. Chilton might use this as an opportunity to exercise his authority over Will. And over us.”

Alana gives a weary nod. “I’ll be sure to nip any power trips in the bud.”

She isn’t quite looking at Hannibal. She knots her fingers in her lap to keep them from shaking. Her breath hitches.

“Alana?”

She squeezes her eyes shut. “I’ve failed Will. I don’t know who that was who bit you. Somewhere along the way he was replaced by a stranger, by an *impostor*, and I just couldn’t see. I didn’t want to. I wanted to pretend…”

He reaches for her, but she is sitting too far away and makes no move to close the distance, so he has to drop his arm back on the coverlet.

“Maybe we were wrong,” he says. “Maybe this is who Will is,”—he angles his face so she can better see the bloodstained gauze taped to his cheekbone—“and has always been.”

“I don’t think I can believe that.” An off-note jars in Alana’s voice as she adds, “Can *you*?”

She still won’t look him in the eye.

“Alana,” he asks carefully, “has something else happened?”

She bites her lip. She fears he is too weak, too wounded, to hear what she has to say. So he shrugs off the invalid’s mantle. He sits up and takes her hand, his grip steady, warm, and firm.

“Tell me.”

Finally, she looks right at him. “After the orderlies removed Will from his cell, the FBI sent in agents to confiscate his files. They found a drawing hidden underneath Will’s mattress.”

Hannibal goes very still, that familiar peace before springing. “A drawing?” he repeats, even though he knows.

“*Your* drawing.” A for-now formless accusation in her eyes. “The one you drew of me.”

Hannibal drops her hand and turns away, looking into the far corner of the room with his mouth slightly open. “Will had my drawing?”

Alana isn’t fooled. “How did he get it?”

He waits. The bite thrums on his cheek, and he lets himself feel it. Only when his vision begins to swim with pain does he answer her. “I noticed it was missing. I assumed I had misplaced it. I had a habit of carrying it with me, you see. In my bag.”

“*Why* were you carrying it in your *bag*?”

He looks back at her now, composed anew, eyes frank and calm. “I liked knowing it was there. I had my bag with me during sessions with Will. Perhaps I left it unattended, too close to the bars, and…”

“…and he took it from you.”

“He must have.”

Silence. When Alana next speaks, her voice is empty of its usual music.

“Is that really what happened?”

“Alana,” he says, with genuine frustration, “how am I to know what really happened?”

They are approaching the precipice, Alana and he. And Alana, despite her better instincts, is creeping forward, rocks crumbling under her feet as she skirts the edge. He must try, through the sound of his voice and the softness of his eyes, to woo her back to safer ground.

Alana is shaking her head. “Will wouldn’t have stolen it. Why would he? Why would he *need* the drawing,”—her cheeks color—“when he has his imagination? It doesn’t make sense.”

“I see no other explanation,” he says. “Obviously I didn’t give him the drawing of my own volition.”

She shuts her eyes again. He clenches his jaw against his exhale, watching her.

“No,” she answers, “that’s not what I’m suggesting.”

He releases his breath. “Then what are you suggesting?”

“*I don’t know*!” Alana sputters into a shout. “I can’t fathom—I can’t even gather enough evidence to make a guess. I don’t understand anything anymore, because no one —I just don’t—” She pinches her eyebrows together. “I’m sorry,” she says, quietly. “We shouldn’t be talking about this right now, not while you’re in pain. I don’t know why I’m—I’m very tired.”

“Then rest.”

“I should go to the hospital, get to the bottom of this. And Nigella—I still have to call her, she doesn’t know what happened—”

He takes both her hands and massages the little bones beneath her skin. “You need to rest, Alana.”

A watery exhale. “I’m sorry,” she says, again.

“I’m sorry, too.” He reaches up, thumbs away one of her tears. “Of course after what happened we both feel guilty. And we are guilty, one and all. We are guilty of telling ourselves stories to help us better understand our experiences, because through understanding we believe we take ahold of those experiences, thus we control them. But there comes a time when stories can’t help us anymore. No matter how beautiful and tightly woven they may be, they fail to capture the truth. It spills through every hole and crevice. In the end, we are left holding nothing, only our treacherous impressions of events. Our impressions and our feelings, mutable as eels.” His hand cups the side of her face. “What’s important is not what you know. It’s how you feel. How do you feel now, Alana?”

Very slowly—as if another force is pulling her back—Alana extends her hand towards him. In a mirror of his gesture, she brushes her fingers against his unmarked cheek.

“I feel lost,” she whispers.

“So do I.”

He stays still beneath her touch. The only movement is in his eyes, where tears gather.

She sees the tears. And suddenly she is leaning into him, seeking solace in his warmth, mouthing gently at his lips. On the edge of the bed—which is really the edge of a precipice—they kiss. Hannibal must pull her away from that fatal summit. So he pulls her onto the bed, pulls her on top of him…but she pulls away.

“No—your stitches, I could hurt you.”

“You won’t.”

He eases her back down.

She kisses him again, as softly as before. Her fingers ghost over the swollen planes of his face, across his chest and down his sides. She is careful to keep her weight on the mattress rather than on him.

“Alana.” A plea in his voice. “You can touch me.”

So she grips him at the joining of neck and shoulder and kisses him firmly. He half-sits up, encouraging her, pushing her knees until they are tight against his ribs. Her hair cascades around both their faces. But she is still holding back.

Within the circle of darkness created by Alana’s hair, Hannibal looks up at her. “*Kiss* me. Please. You have nothing to fear.”

And the gleam of her uncertainty begins to dim. She plants her palms against his pectorals as she kisses him and kisses him, her weight an insistent pressure against him as though she might crush his truth right out of him, expel it from the dark cavern of his ribcage.

“How’s this?” she asks, a little threat in her voice.

“Good start. But you can do better. Hold me closer.” He grunts. “Harder.”

She all but falls on top of him, pulling at his shirt—the same shirt she so kindly helped him button in the hospital—and while she isn’t quite so forceful as to tear the buttons off, she certainly loosens a few as she gropes at them.

“That’s the spirit,” he says, chuckling.

Bared to the cold room, his skin prickles. Her elegant fingers paddle at his chest hair.

“Use your nails.”

She does. Around his nipples, along his sternum, down his back.

“That’s it. Dig in.”

Where she clutches him, pink marks like little comets flare.

He loves Alana like this: inhibitions removed, no more inertia from too much thinking, body alight with a reckless emotion halfway between desire and anger. She has gone wild, and in her wildness, so biddable, fictile beneath his fingers like the most exquisite clay.

“Mmh, Alana—my hair.”

She pulls it with both hands and he groans.

Their heartbeats knock against each other in *tempo misterioso*. She slams him against the headboard. Twists his wrists. Laps his clavicle. Sucks at the corner of his jaw.

“Alana...” he murmurs. “That feels wonderful. You feel wonderful. Don’t stop.” Then, hardly aware of what he’s saying:

“Alana, *bite me*.”

For a shadow of a second, he feels the glance of teeth.

Then his words—each in isolation a senseless noise, the fevered bleatings of an animal—exert an infernal magnetism and come together, strands of meaning interlocking, interweaving, becoming a design with a whetted edge that cleanly penetrates Alana’s understanding, and just like that his spell is broken.

She pulls away from him, bright blue eyes open as wide as they go, and in one long, mechanical movement she slides to the end of the bed where she sits with her elbows braced

on her knees, face buried in her arms, the cuffs of her unbuttoned shirtsleeves flapping around her like torn wings.

He lies half-undressed, still panting, shocked by her, shocked at himself, appalled at his own comprehension which lags so far behind them.

“Alana?” he hazards, inadequate.

She can’t answer him.

“I don’t know why I said that.” Perfect honesty from him.

She still doesn’t speak. But someone else does.

“*I’ll* bite you,” says Will.

Hannibal’s spine snaps straight, his every sense blazing. He turns his head creakily, as if it’s on a spindle.

Will can’t be here. Will is inside the Baltimore State Hospital; Will is always inside the Baltimore State Hospital. Reassuring to know at all hours, with godlike certainty, exactly where Will is. At the moment he is pinioned by restraints and tranquilized into an enchanted sleep from which he’s waiting to be woken. Will can’t be here. Will can’t see this. Yet here he is, sitting low in an armchair by the fireplace, smiling glossily with his thumbnail wedged between his teeth. He has one leg outstretched, heel bouncing on the corner of the mattress.

“This,” he says, crisply, “is… *tragic*.”

The sound of Will’s voice sets off a chain reaction inside Hannibal. His awareness doubles. He isn’t in his bedroom with Alana. *He* is inside the Baltimore State Hospital, and Alana is dead. Why is he remembering this? Of all his memories, of all the curiosities in his jewel box of wonders, why this?

“What are you doing here?” he asks Will, by which he means, *what am I*? For he knows Will has somehow compelled Hannibal into reliving this memory. How can Will wield such power over him, when Will is but a memory himself?

“I’ve visited all your favorite memories,” Will says. “Those places you return to time and again. So I thought, why not explore your, uh, least favorite places? A tour of the traumatic. Now I realize I should have done that first. So much more *revealing*, isn’t it?”

Will’s eyes take him in: Hannibal sitting exposed on the bed, the skin of his chest goose-pimpled and fingernail-tracked, the gauze on his face reddening as the bite mark oozes blood. Beneath Will’s predatory gaze, Hannibal feels vulnerable in spite of himself.

“Your being here,” he says, “is inappropriate.”

Will’s smile widens.

Hannibal is not deterred. “If you and I are to share these halls, then we must learn to cohabitate peacefully. A little consideration is all I ask.”

“A little consideration.” Will’s eyes flick to Alana, still as a statue on the bed. “Is that the same consideration you showed her?” His expression coarsens. “The same consideration you showed me, when you first planted your flag inside *my* mind?”

Hannibal pulls his mantle of dignity tighter around his half-bared form. “I’ve always done what I thought best for both of you.”

Will raises his eyebrows eloquently.

As if on cue, Alana takes her hands away from her face, which is very red but dry-eyed. Will’s expression softens as he watches her. Hannibal watches her, too: Alana untethered at the precipice’s edge.

“They’re expecting me at the hospital,” she says. Her voice is tight, perfunctory. “I should go.”

In the record of his memory Hannibal protests Alana’s departure; he tries one more time with wheedling words to bind her back to him. But the Hannibal of the Baltimore State Hospital can only stare at Alana. He is struck dumb by Will’s sudden presence in this memory, and by the veneer over Alana’s despair now palpably apparent to him.

She stands up, buttons her creased blouse. She sweeps her hair over her shoulders, a deceptively casual gesture. He wants to touch her, console her, but he doesn’t. That is not what happened.

“We’ll talk about this later,” she says, voice rising as if she’s asking a question. Will takes it upon himself to answer it, his voice an elegiac lilt.

“You won’t. You never will. No more mediated discussions for you, Alana. No more problem solving. No more painstaking navigation of those choppy emotional waters salted through with fallen tears. I’m afraid you’ve been scuppered! You’ve sprung a leak, and now—*you sink*.”

With this, Will removes his foot from the bed to clear her path to the door. Alana brushes past him without seeing him and vanishes into the annihilating hinterlands of the half-forgotten.

Now Will and Hannibal are alone. Alone in this memory that was carefully preserved and even more carefully mislaid. They regard each other in silence, both their faces expressionless and shadowed. Then Will says:

“You killed her, you realize.”

“I know.”

“You don’t know.” Will levers himself out of the chair and sits at the foot of Hannibal’s bed. “You think you killed her in your kitchen for opening the door between your secrets and the

world. You blame Alana's death on Alana. And on me. And on Barney, and on Beverly, and on Jack, and on everybody within a twenty-mile radius of the event."

As Will speaks, he crawls on hands and knees up the length of the mattress, forcing Hannibal back down to the pillows, bracing himself above where Hannibal now lies. He lowers himself until their noses almost brush and breathes his words directly into Hannibal's skin.

"But you're wrong. Because you didn't kill Alana in your kitchen. *You killed her here*. In this bed. You killed her when your mask slipped. In that moment you showed her who you really are, and then you let her walk out of here with that knowledge ticking away inside her, counting down to the inevitable big bang. It was you, Hannibal. It was all you. You, and you alone, are guilty—"

Hannibal lunges. He seizes Will's shoulders, twists him down, and straddles him on the mattress: their previous positions reversed in a shutter-blink.

Will stares up at him in almost childlike surprise, as if he doesn't understand what he has done to deserve this punishment. But an instant later, a high-pitched laugh erupts out of him. "Now where did *that* come from?"

And Hannibal realizes he is holding the linoleum knife to Will's throat.

Will gives it a ferocious smile. "Should have figured I wouldn't be the only thing to find its way out of Wolf Trap."

Hannibal doesn't speak. He feels a wave of disappointment at himself for having violated the boundaries of his memory palace so flagrantly. But his hand remains steady as he keeps the knife poised over Will.

"So it appears I've hit a nerve," Will says. "Comforting to know you've got at least one."

Hannibal's eyes are tunnel-black. "There are doors inside my palace you cannot safely open."

Will raises his head, so that the point of the knife presses against his skin. "Then lock them," he says. "But you won't do that. Because I think you *like* it. Gives you a thrill, the thought of me wandering through your secret places. You killed Alana for prying—or so you claim—but you won't kill me." His eyelashes flutter as he eyes the knife. "Being seen is all you've ever wanted. You won't kill me."

They stare, unblinking, unmoving save for their throbbing chests. They are at an impasse. Then the linoleum knife simply vanishes, back to whence it came. Hannibal drops his now-empty hand. Heaves a breath.

"I let you live," he says. "I let you roam free. There but for the grace of God you go, Will."

Will slumps back on the pillows, looking disappointed now that the knife has gone. "Free," he sighs. "Is that what we're calling this?"

Hannibal observes this creature pinned beneath him like a butterfly. So like Will to push Hannibal. So like Will to undermine his every word. Hannibal craves the challenge Will

presents; he has always craved it, even though he knows this craving to be dangerous. It is doubly dangerous now. This is not Will.

“You are here as my guest,” he says, “and I try to be hospitable. But if you flout me, Will—if you can’t behave—then do not mistake me: I will drag you back to Wolf Trap by the hair.”

The threat hangs heavy in the air between them. For a moment Will only looks up at him, face blanked. Then his personality floods his expression, like a glass suddenly brimming over with light.

“Oh, Hannibal,” he says. “*Bite me*.”

The words hit Hannibal like a slap. His lips bend with distaste.

“You still think you can train me?” Will leans forward, bares his teeth. “Put a collar on me and bring me to heel?”

Hannibal extricates himself from the bed. Will pushes himself up to his knees, the blankets tangled under him like a nest as he hollers after Hannibal.

“You should know by now that I won’t be muzzled and I won’t be molded. The world will end before I lie down at your feet. I know who I am.” He punches his own chest for emphasis. “I do what I do. Whistle all you want, Hannibal, but I DON’T COME WHEN YOU CALL ME.”

A pang of dread stops Hannibal on the threshold. He turns back. The look on Will’s face—that knowing, gloating expression of glacial fury—haunts him long after he has emerged from the palace.

Before the morning session begins, a loose backstage atmosphere reigns in the courtroom. Journalists mill in tight circles, comparing notes. The videographers level their tripods and check their camera settings. Members of the gallery whisper together, straightening their collars, cleaning their glasses. Freddie checks her vermillion lipstick with a hand mirror. Brauer flips through depositions, pretending to make notes. Meanwhile Hannibal is watching the prosecution table, where an intense little congress is underway. Helen Weaver, arms crossed over her squarish blazer, is speaking quietly to Kade Prurnell and Jack Crawford. Prurnell chops her palm for emphasis, jaw clenched. Meanwhile Jack lowers his head in deference, doing more listening than speaking.

Their tête-à-tête-à-tête is interrupted by the bailiff, who announces Judge Wallis's entrance into the courtroom. Hannibal stands for the judge, but his eyes remain on the prosecution table.

Weaver gives Prurnell a minute, decisive nod. Then Prurnell and Jack return to the gallery.

Wallis takes his seat and rolls up his sleeves as is his custom. “Good morning, everyone. Let’s get back to it. Ms. Weaver, if you would call your next witness?”

But Hannibal isn’t looking at Weaver. He has tracked Jack back to his bench in the gallery. Next to Jack, an empty seat.

The courtroom doors open.

Weaver stands and takes a deep breath, ready to begin.

Beverly enters the courtroom, arms swinging, all determination, and slips into the seat Jack has saved for her. Jack nudges Beverly and the two of them turn as one, meeting Hannibal’s stare, steel clashing with steel. And Hannibal knows what is about to happen.

“Your Honor,” Weaver announces in a ringing voice, “the prosecution rests.”

Chapter End Notes

The memory Hannibal unwillingly visits occurs in the period between Chapters 21 and 22 on the He Who Pours Out Vengeance timeline.

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